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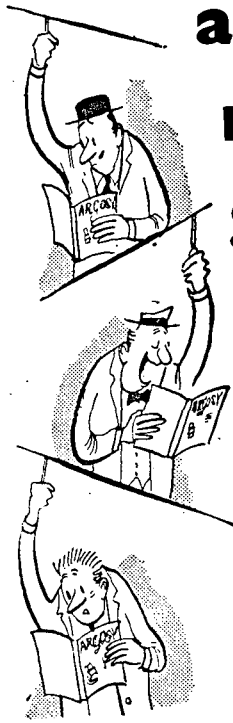

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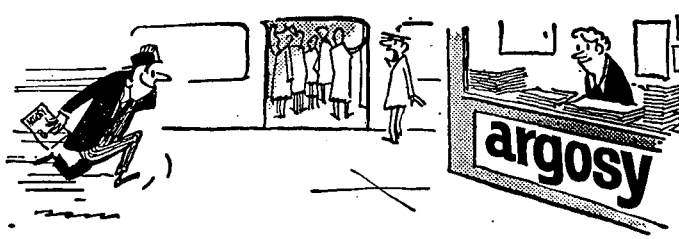

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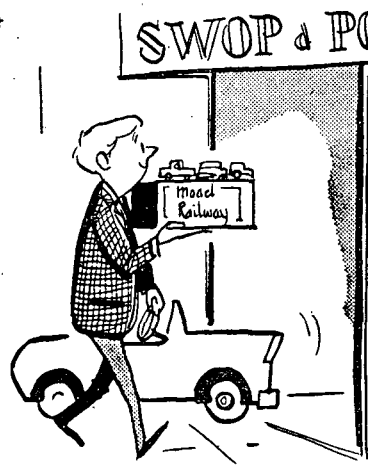


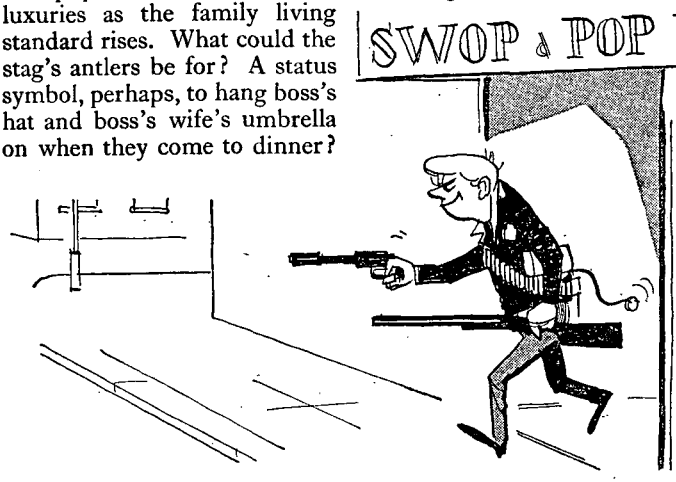
Log Book

SOME people lead planned, decisive lives, demolishing one set of circumstances before they move on to the next. An example of this is a lady who advertised recently in a small-ad. column.

FOR SALE play pen, baby's bath, nylon rompers, matinée coat, pram set.

WANTED climbing frame, pushchair, electric foodmixer, stag's antlers.

There you have a diagram of her life, baby growing, first set of equipment cleared away, second stage laid in, plus a few luxuries as the family living standard rises. What could the stag's antlers be for? A status symbol, perhaps, to hang boss's hat and boss's wife's umbrella on when they come to dinner?



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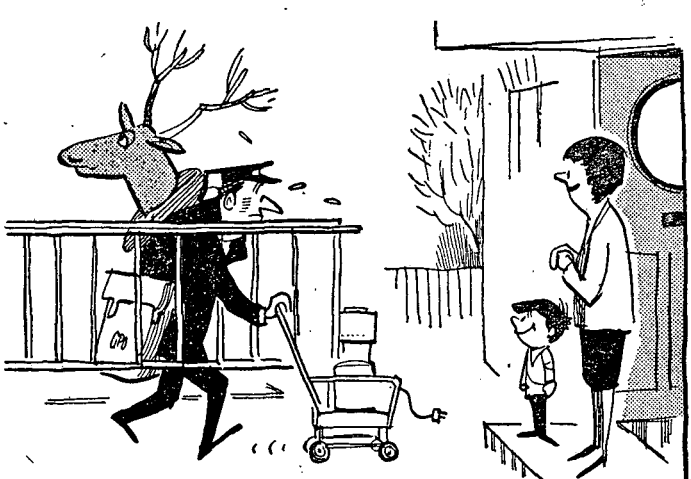
Then there was the teenager who in the same magazine offered for sale a model railway, Dinky toys, and Kiddikar; asked in exchange black leather jacket, electric razor, cartridge belt, 16-bore hammerless, .22 Webley with silencer, and knuckle-dusters. Shades of the prison-house, as Wordsworth sadly observed, begin to close upon the growing boy . . .

A Cornish gentleman offered a pocket Gym—only £3. This did seem a bargain if one knew how it worked—plus judo suit, height increaser, neck developer, strength course, weights, and Dynamic Tension course. He lived in Helston, and we confidently expect to hear pretty soon now of Helston Hercules, the new world heavyweight.

But other people—we fear we are numbered among them—at the bottom end of the scale, seem to live in a random manner, and will probably end up as greybeards with the play pen and nylon rompers still packed away in the attic among a lot of miscellaneous clobber, bass accordions, knitting machines with half a sock, welding kit never used, timing clocks for pigeons, and sets of mixed stamps.

We had a friend like that, Walt Trubshawe; he never could resist a bargain offer; Giant Closing-Down Cuts, and Fabulous Slashed-to-a-Snip Bankrupt Stock offers always ensnared him. When we first met him at school he had just written up for a Fully Illustrated Brigitte Bardot only 3s. 6d. and was bitterly disappointed by what arrived.

He took a job as a Young Improver with Opportunities,



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working for a butcher in Balham, and soon rose to Cooked Meat Hand. But he was sacked for rashly buying a secondhand Cold Room with 3-stage Derinder machine thrown in, using his boss's name. He set up on his own, enthusiastically acquiring a hundredweight of green garnishing in 10-inch sections, not to mention bowl cutters, stainless steel steam cooking plant—we find steel steam hard to imagine and always have—with a bargain line in sausage-skin spooling machinery.

Outside working hours he tried to make extra cash by acquiring: a Million Toys at 13s. 6d. for 100, including Woo-Woo's, Jumping Shrimp, et cetera.

Everybody was sorry for Walter when he went bankrupt but it turned out to be a blessing in disguise. After satisfactorily disposing of the house—YOUNG COUPLE, emigrating Australia, wish sell house with Entire Contents, interesting and unusual—Walter settled in the outback, far from the evil lure of bargain offers.

Or fairly far—the last we heard of Walter was a small-ad in *Swop & Pop:*

WANTED Back numbers, complete, *Practical Home Money-maker* and *Argosy* from 1880 on.

Let us hope that good reading will float Walter at last into a serene old age! JOHN SILVER

Horatio

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Champagne on the dirt track

BY VIVIAN CONNELL

LOCHLIN came into the Golden Wheel. In the hall, the porter in blue uniform sat by the guest book.

"Do I sign?"

"Your name, sir?"

"Lochlin."

"Ah! In the Blue Book, sir, for drivers who have won a Grand Prix."

In the niche was a wheel of solid gold. Lochlin read the plaque:

Prince Carlo Canniola
In Memory

"Founded this club, sir. Always drove with a golden wheel."

"He was killed," said Lochlin. "Where can I get a steak?"

"The grill on left, the bar on right, sir."

Lochlin stepped into the long room. The bar was loud and vibrating on the night before the Grand Prix. Blonde pit babies. The gods of the wheel. Lochlin saw the golden mop of hair and waved to Moppy Brown. Then he turned left into the grill and sat at a table.

Pat, the blonde baby who hung around the Leopard pit and haunted Moppy, opened her blue eyes.

"Lochlin!" She smiled.

Milland, the club secretary, looked over at the young American.

"That Lochlin? First time here. Might have come and said good evening. Pretty cool."

"That's his way. He's a loner, Lochlin." Moppy looked at Pat with her eyes away. "And he doesn't need you. All the babes in Europe . . . But nobody takes Lochlin."

"Ah," said Milland. "I heard that said once before, about Portogano, the Spaniard . . . And then Christina walked in that door . . . Beautiful as death."

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Death reminded Moppy of the Suicide S Bend down at Blindwood. This morning in a practice lap Whitman had gone over the bank and died in a burst of flame. Moppy scowled.

"There's nothing beautiful about death."

"You haven't met Christina," said Milland.

Pat went over to the bar, and Moppy sat on a table and drank his lemonade from a silver ale tankard. Here he was in London, around him people laughing, all his friends—and he was alone. Alone with Lochlin. Level with Lochlin. Out in the lead for the World Championship—and Blindwood tomorrow and three more Grand Prix to go. Twice today in his green Leopard he had broken the lap record, twice Lochlin had taken it back in his red Ferrano. It had been that way all the season since Monaco. And, tomorrow, Moppy badly wanted to win at home in England . . .

But Lochlin was going through the Suicide without the brake in some miraculous way and gaining two seconds in the S on every lap. Sixty laps, two minutes. This morning Whit had snorted through his blond moustache. "We just can't take that. I'm going to get on his tail and see how he rides the S . . ."

Well, Whitman had tried . . . Suddenly Moppy saw the burst of yellow flame and the tankard shook in his hand. Behind his lazy round face and sleepy grey eyes, Moppy was ticking like a clock.

Boy, it was a tough business, these days. No prince with a golden wheel, no baron with pink champagne, no Countess Christina with perfumed death in her kiss. Only Leopard and Ferrano locked in mortal combat for the market. And Lochlin and Moppy living like Spartans. Death jockeys riding the Leopard and Ferrano. All the glamour had gone by. The baron had been killed in Germany, the prince in Belgium, and Portogano had gone over a cliff in Sicily—with his eye off the road and glancing up in the blue sky at Christina following the Giro in her yellow plane. All three had loved Christina, and all three had died. But at least they had lived in violence and beauty with her and . . .

All the young Grand Prix drivers were haunted by the legend of Christina. She had become a legend, but it was only three years ago she had quit the Grand Prix circuit when Portogano had been killed. Somewhere she was alive and breathing, perhaps in her native Norway.

Moppy looked over at the babes. All in blue jeans around the pit. All tomboys. All called Pat or Tommy. Once, in disgust, Whit and Moppy had gone upstairs to the Ladies' Gallery just to look at the painting of Christina. Whit had said

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bluntly, "You know, when I got into this game, I expected something like Christina. And look what I've got—a bird in blue jeans. We got here too late for Christina, Moppy, too late for the glory!"

Moppy put down his silver tankard with a bang. He wanted to talk to somebody, but not anybody in the bar. To a stranger. To Lochlin. But Lochlin did not welcome anybody. Moppy saw Pat coming over, and got away to the door. Lochlin saw him going, and waved a hand.

Moppy went upstairs to the Ladies' Gallery. There was nobody there, and the only light was above the painting of Christina. Portogano had given the painting, and had asked that the light should be always on her face.

Suddenly Moppy felt like a bullfighter who had come into the chapel to pray before the corrida. He walked up slowly, feeling the naked blue eyes looking into him.

"Lord," he whispered, "you are beautiful." He began to feel a strange lightness in him. What was it? A state of grace? Then suddenly, cold on his skin, he felt danger in the room.

Moppy turned abruptly and went downstairs. Lochlin had finished his meal and was reading a book. On impulse, Moppy walked over. Lochlin looked up.

"I saw you go out, I thought you had gone home."

Lean face, cool blue eyes, a waiting look. Dark suit, white collar, plain Ivy League tie.

"I was upstairs with Christina."

"Christina?"

"The Countess Christina? You have heard of her?"

"Oh . . . Yes." Lochlin looked surprised. "Is she here?"

"No. But there's a painting of her upstairs in the Ladies' Gallery." Moppy paused. "Funny—when I look at her picture, I always think she is dead."

"Dead? Why?"

"Well, I've never seen anybody so beautiful alive—so I guess I feel she is dead, like the prince, and the baron, and Portogano . . . Like to go up and see the painting?"

"No," said Lochlin, cold. "What the hell has she got to do with us?"

"Nothing." Moppy felt awkward, standing. "Would you like a coffee with me?"

"Tea with lemon, thank you."

Moppy turned to Jameson in his blue jacket and asked for a pot of tea with lemon.

"Could you take it there in the ingle, Mr. Brown? We are closing the grill."

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Lochlin slipped the marker in his book and came with Moppy to the ingle. It was an alcove between the grill and bar and had two tables, facing the door.

Lochlin put his book on the table and said, "When I went over to Milan, Ferrano told me about Christina. I guess it was a warning. He said those three guys really died in her bed. You can't drive on love and champagne. And why go to all that trouble, when you can die—like Whitman died this morning."

He's a cold guy, thought Moppy, as he poured the tea.

"I know, Lochlin. But when I get sick of those blue-jean babes, I like to go up and look at Christina—and to feel she is looking at me."

Then Lochlin was silent. There was no way to contact Lochlin. Moppy picked up his book and opened it at the marker.

"Oh, a book of poems!"

"Yes. My father teaches English Literature at Harvard. So it's in my blood. Besides—when you live with the poets, death doesn't seem so mortal."

Moppy hid his surprise and looked at the poem on the facing page. Then, maybe warmed by Lochlin, he read it aloud.

Death is not a ghost.
She is bright, graceful,
And brings you no harm.

When she walks in the door—
Then rise, embrace her,
And give her your arm.

"That's taken from the old Gaelic, by Conal O'Shane. My father knew him."

Moppy was silent. This was not his world. Lochlin sipped his tea.

Then suddenly all the noise in the bar stopped.

Moppy looked up. It was as if all the light in the room had gone out, and the only light was on the lady who paused in the doorway. Lochlin put down his cup and breathed, "Who is that?"

"The lady in the poem," said Moppy softly.

She came in a step and Milland was close by the door.

"Good evening, Mr. Milland."

Milland had almost lost his breath in surprise.

"Good evening, Countess."

Now she paused and looked straight into Lochlin's eyes. Then, as if she had not seen him, she came and sat at the other table in the alcove. In an instant, Jameson had come by.

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" Good evening, Jameson. As always."

" Yes, m'lady," said Jameson, as if she was an English noblewoman.

The Countess Christina could sit in her beauty, be still and silence the room. She sat in her own light. The naked blue eyes were like the fiords of Norway, and even by the lamp they had the light of day. She was only a table away, and did not look once at Lochlin or Moppy, but Moppy could feel her tingling on his skin. Lochlin was looking into his book, but Moppy knew he was seeing the naked blue eyes.

" Tea? " asked Moppy and his hand shook as he poured.

In the bar, the talk was broken like the noise of starlings. They could not get back into casual gossip and laughter again. Anything Moppy might say would be heard by Christina, and he began to sweat in silence as Lochlin turned over the pages.

" Just read any one, for heaven's sake! "

Moppy saw the smile, quick as light, on Christina's face, and knew he had been a fool. Then Jameson came with a bottle of champagne in an ice-pail and a silver dish of caviare and strips of toast. He stood away waiting for Madam to finish the caviare.

Moppy nearly laughed aloud in his tension. The whole bar was like a suburban audience watching a star on the screen eating caviare and toast. Lochlin was lost in his book . . . he was a man away on an island. At last the Countess had done, and Jameson came to open the champagne.

" Bring two more glasses, Jameson, please."

Moppy almost jumped. He waited, tingling all over, while Jameson opened the bottle and filled the three glasses. Then Christina looked over. Her voice always had the haunting of music.

" I do not like to drink alone. Would you gentlemen . . . ? "

Moppy glanced at Lochlin. He did not look up.

" Mr. Lochlin, would you care for some champagne? "

Lochlin looked up and his voice was lazy and cool.

" Thank you, but I don't wish for champagne—and I am reading a book."

" Then, Mr. Brown? "

Moppy could feel all the eyes in the silent bar on him. Was this a kind of challenge, a kind of Grand Prix between Lochlin and him? Moppy got up with a smile, and bowed, and took the chair opposite Christina. Suddenly he was bold, sure of himself.

" Thank you, Countess." He paused, smiled. " I know who you are. I often look at your picture in the Ladies' Gallery. But how do you know me, and Lochlin? "

" I look at television. And the papers."

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She raised her glass. "To what may happen."

Moppy took up his glass. There was a flush on his face. "Countess, in fact, I do not drink, but, in honour . . ."

Moppy had not seen Lochlin move and he was surprised when Lochlin took the glass from his hand.

"I'll take that, Moppy."

Moppy was stunned. His face burnt. Anger kicked in him, and he got up ready to swing a punch. Lochlin looked at him with cool blank eyes. Moppy paused. Lochlin was taking over. Almost like an older brother . . . Then the Countess covered it all.

"Oh, you have to go? I am so sorry."

Moppy, still bemused, gave a polite bow and was on his way to the door. Lochlin smiled and put down the glass.

"May I sit down?"

"But, yes!" She raised her glass. "To what may happen."

Lochlin did not touch his glass. "Countess, I don't drink."

There was a cold blue flash in the wonderful eyes. Then she smiled.

"Do you mind if I drink?"

"No. But the Ferrano won't go with champagne in the tank. So I don't drink while racing. Nor does Moppy." He smiled. "You are quite a surprise here this evening, Countess."

"Why?"

"Perhaps they didn't expect you again. I know it is only a few years ago, but it almost seems another century—since the prince, and the baron, and Portogano . . ."

"You don't seem surprised that I am here, Mr. Lochlin."

"No. But then I have always been waiting for you, to walk in the door, bright, graceful . . . Why did you come back?"

She lit a cigarette and put it in a long holder.

"Your face haunted me, Mr. Lochlin, when I saw it on the screen. I could not understand why . . . So I came back to know. You are so old, for a young American, old as Venice . . ."

It hung like the grey smoke between them, and then suddenly she looked into his eyes. Like a plunge into the cold blue waters of a fiord. Down and down into light that had no sounding . . .

She laid two five-pound notes on the table and she never took any change.

"Thank you, m'lady," said Jameson.

The steps were sharp down into the Mayfair square and Lochlin said, "May I give you my arm?"

There was a beautiful moon and she said softly, "A moon for a nightingale."

They walked to her car, long and shining in the moonlight.

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"The Ferrano Uccello!"

"My beautiful songbird, that sings on the road."

"And that is my Uccello . . ."

"So—I parked alongside you. Almost touching . . . I am staying in London. And you?"

"Down in the country. Near Blindwood. I'm at Arbour Lodge."

"Ah, the beautiful old inn. I have stayed there. Lattice windows, and a nightingale always in the wood. This is a night to sleep in the country . . . And I love to sleep in my skin . . . Which car? And who drives?"

Lochlin opened the door of her Uccello and signed with his hand and she got in behind the wheel. He looked at her beauty in the moonlight, then raised her hand but did not touch it with his lips.

"Good night, Christina. And good-bye."

He went to his Uccello, put the book of poems on the seat beside him, ran up the engine, and cruised out of the square. Just before the corner, he heard the scream of her engine like a cry of rage, and in his mirror saw her car leap forward. Lochlin did not get a red light in quiet Mayfair and there was only one car behind him—and he knew it was the Uccello. At Marble Arch, he just beat the red, but she did not make it, and he was away on the long road by Hyde Park. Once more he got the green, and once more she did not make it, and it might go on that way, out into the country.

Lochlin was not thinking at all. He had been waiting for this, since he had come to Europe, and when he saw that she was riding an Uccello, his mind had acted like his hand on a gear change at a bend. He was driving as fast as he dare in London, and getting away like a bowshot from all the reds, and when at last he got clear of the suburbs, and out on the bypass, there was no light from behind in his mirror.

On the long straight that opened the bypass into the country, his needle shot up to a hundred and seventy kilometres. There was only the silver reeling of the landscape in his mirror, and under the clear moon he drove by the famous Ferrano moon-beam lights.

It was only going into woodland again that he saw the beam on the high trees.

She must be on the slight rise less than half a mile behind.

Lochlin went into a bend with a screaming horn and prayed there was no police car on the road. There were maybe twenty bends in the woodland to the five-mile clearway, and, barring Moppy Brown, nobody could live with him at this cornering

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speed. His face was stinging with cold, but his body was sweating when at last he came out on the clearway in open country, and let the Uccello go.

He had gone a mile when the light from behind jumped again in his mirror. Lochlin saw that his needle was at a hundred and ninety, and nothing but an Uccello could be doing the two hundred plus that brought the light into his mirror.

Four more miles, and he would be cornering again in woodland, and away and home to Arbour Lodge. Lochlin shot up his needle, and on the lone road it was like riding in a Sahara by the moon.

The light from behind danced on the leaves above as he slowed into the woodland. Then, in a shock, Lochlin knew he had forgotten the Hangman's Oak. It was a lone historic tree, standing on an island just inside the opening into the woodland, and it was blurred and shining and lost in the moonlight coming through the beeches. Lochlin braked and swung by in a scream and nearly took away the guard-chain around the Hangman's Oak.

"Lord," he gasped, "that tree is like a ghost that you can't see in the moonlight!"

Then he aimed the Uccello into the oncoming bend . . .

The country was quiet and sleeping when Lochlin got out of the Uccello at Arbour Lodge. There was a light in the porch that shone on the climbing roses, and probably Mrs. Jones had gone to bed. The garden breathed sweet in moonlight as Lochlin opened the gate. He paused on the path and looked back on the London road. There was not a sound nor a light. Nothing to break the song of the nightingale, nothing to haunt his own sleep.

But Lochlin had known at the Hangman's Oak that nobody would be along.

© Vivian Connell 1964

CAR-DIOGRAM!

I knew a man who loved Mercedes
More than liquor, lucre, ladies,
Wore the proud three-pointed star
On tie as well as motor car,
On handkerchief and undervest
And, in tattoo, upon his chest.

W. H. CHARNOCK,
Collected Motor Verses

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SNIPE HUNT

BY BORDEN DEAL

THERE are certain things that come along at certain times in a man's growing up. You live through them, you get what you can out of them, and when you're older you look back and see that they had a meaning after all.

Your first date with a girl, your first snipe hunt, or the first time you go hunting by yourself are watersheds. When you've passed a watershed you're different from the way you were before; sometimes better and sometimes worse, because everybody is different and so these important things have a different meaning for everyone.

I'd heard of snipe hunts all my life. It was one of those vague things you knew about, like the hoop snake that could put its tail in its mouth and roll like a wheel, but when you got right down to it your facts were mostly absent. I just figured it was one of those things I'd missed out on because since my father had been crippled in the sawmill accident the year I was fourteen I'd had to take on more work and responsibility than the other boys. I'd heard the men laughing sometimes, telling about snipe hunts they'd been on when they'd been sixteen or seventeen. I even knew dimly the basic principles of snipe hunting, just like I knew the basic principles of asking a girl for that first date. But I hadn't ever practised them.

That fall, anyway, I was spending most of my time thinking about that second set of basic principles. That was because of Charlene.

There were five houses close enough together to be called a community, held together by a general store and a gristmill. I lived in one of those houses, Paul and Crawford and Shorty lived in the other three respectively, and Charlene lived in the fifth, the one right behind the general store that her father owned. My father owned the gristmill now, since he couldn't handle the sawmill any more.

Of course, other people lived in those houses too, such as older and younger brothers and sisters, and parents. But they

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didn't count. Because the five of us were just about the same age and we had our own little world going.

There was nothing different about that; we'd always played together, gone to school together, and all that, at least until my father was hurt. They still did; but there were times when I couldn't go along because of things to look after at home, me being the oldest. So I didn't belong to the group quite as much as the others, though I did my best. Except for that, though, nothing had changed—except Charlene.

She'd always been called Charlie by the rest of us, because you could hardly tell she was a girl, she was so good at playing the wild games we invented. She was a pretty comfortable kind of girl to be around. But all of a sudden she'd taken to wearing dresses all the time and she didn't play our games any more. She began helping her father in the store and wearing lipstick and all such crazy things as that.

Not that Paul and Crawford and Shorty and I didn't like it. We did. But Charlene wasn't Charlie any more, she was a stranger. And towards the end of that summer the idea began to come to us that Charlene was the kind of girl you wanted to have a date with.

Our old Charlie would have hooted at us if we'd broached such an idea; but we secretly believed that the new Charlene would welcome it.

Except we didn't believe it hard enough to try it. One day about a week before school started Paul and Crawford and Shorty and I had a long, sober conversation on the subject. We had decided to go fishing for one last time, even if the weather was too hot for fishing, and, sitting on the bank with our feet in the water, we began talking about it.

"I wish old Charlie was with us," Shorty said in a nostalgic voice. "She hasn't been fishing with us all summer long."

"Girls reach a certain age, they forget how to fish," Paul said. "Just like they forget how to climb trees."

"They don't forget," I said. "They just quit doing."

"They forget," Paul said. "If they didn't, why don't they ever do it? Would you give up tree-climbing? But did you ever see a girl over fifteen climb a tree in your life?"

He had us there, pegged on solid scientific observation.

"Yes, sir," Crawford said in a gloomy voice. "First they quit playing games and climbing trees and all that. Then before you know it, you see older boys coming to call on them and taking them to church and dances and to the movies in town. That's what Charlene will be doing."

I don't know where the idea came from. It had been lurking

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somewhere back there in my head, I suppose, just waiting for the chance to come out.

"It could be us," I said. "Maybe she's just waiting for us to ask her for a date. Like the older boys."

All three of them turned and looked at me. I looked back at them. I knew those three boys as well as I knew myself. We'd grown up together. Paul had always been the strongest, for he was the biggest. Crawford thought up the best games, except for Charlie, and Shorty could stay underwater the longest. I'd fought each of them, when we were kids, and I had whipped Crawford and Shorty, and Paul had whipped me.

"Well, why couldn't we?" I blurted into their stranger faces.

"How would you ask her?" Shorty said. "What would you say?"

"Well," I said, my voice stammering around in the midst of my thoughts. "Well, you'd just . . ." I stopped. I didn't know.

"You can't gang up on a girl and ask her for a date," Paul said quietly. "A date is one boy and one girl. There isn't room for more than that."

I hoped they all felt as uncomfortable as I was. I couldn't look at them, so I looked instead at my float in the water. They were watching the floats, too. Up to that minute we had been a gang of boys, friends, even if I was a little separate from the others, and after that minute we were four individuals. Those words had cut us apart, and we all knew it. Because we knew that each of us wanted that first date with Charlene.

We didn't fish long after that and when we parted we did so quietly, as though we were saying farewell. School was starting in a week anyway, the summer was ending, and all of us had a feeling that it was the last summer we'd have like that.

There weren't many opportunities for dates, especially for me. There was Wednesday night prayer meeting, and evening church services on Sunday, and after school started there'd be basketball games. Once in a while there'd be a dance, but not very often, and not this time of year.

For the next week or two, I went through numerous crises. As each event approached—Sunday for church, Wednesday for prayer meeting—I started nerving myself up to ask Charlene to go with me. I'd keep on thinking about it until I'd get into a nervous fever, so that if I happened to see her around the store my throat would choke up and I couldn't even say good day to her. So I'd let it go by and when it was too late I'd kick myself

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for a fool, telling myself that, after all, she was just old Charlie. But I knew better than that; she was Charlene, and I didn't know Charlene.

Then I'd watch to see if one of the others had dared to do what I didn't. And they were all watching me. We were rather tense with each other all during that time as a consequence.

It was October when the best chance of all came along. The school always had a big harvest party in October. They'd decorate the hall with pumpkins and corn-stalks and the women would bring food to be auctioned off, and somebody would tell fortunes in a tent of corn sheaves, and the money all went to buy extras for the school. It was the first big party of the fall and winter.

There were two reasons for doing what I did. One was that I had seen a town boy walking Charlene slowly to the school bus, carrying her books and talking to her. She seemed to like it, too, and it burnt me up. It would be just like Charlene to let him take her to our harvest party.

The second reason was that I knew Paul and Crawford and Shorty were thinking about dating Charlene, just as I was. Because since that day when we went fishing not one of us had said a word about it. We were still friends and there were times when we could forget about how old and serious we were getting to be and still have fun together. But Charlene was there between us all the time and we knew it.

It was just a day or two before the party when I told my big lie. We were sitting around, not doing much of anything, when Paul started it.

"Listen," he said out of nowhere. "Did any of you see that town fellow talking to Charlene the other day?"

His voice was strained and we all looked at him curiously.

"Yes," I said. "I did."

"If we don't watch out, he'll be dating her," he said.

"Let him," Shorty said scornfully. "Who wants to date old Charlie anyway?"

We looked at him and he hushed.

"One of us has got to ask her for the harvest party," Paul said in a desperate voice. "If we don't . . ."

"I'll do it," Crawford said.

"I will," Shorty said right after him.

"I thought nobody wanted to date old Charlie anyway," I reminded him.

Paul held up his hand. "Wait a minute," he said. "Everybody ought to have a fair chance. We'll draw straws and the winner shall take her."

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"That's kid stuff," Crawford said. "You can't draw straws over dating a girl. She ain't no water melon."

It didn't seem right, at that. But none of us had a better idea. I took a deep breath and before I could stop myself I told the biggest lie I've ever told in my life.

"You don't have to worry about that town boy," I said. "I've already dated Charlene for the harvest party."

If I'd dropped a hand grenade I couldn't have had more attention. They looked at me and far back in my mind I was thinking, Wallace, you've done it now. Now you've *got* to ask her. And what if she turns you down?

"You already asked her?" Paul said in an ominous voice.

"Sure," I said unflinchingly. I was in now. I might as well go the whole hog.

Paul stared at me for a moment, then he started walking away. I stared at his back, a sinking feeling inside me. But there wasn't anything I could do. I had told the lie and I was stuck with it.

"Well, that's too bad," Crawford said in a loud voice. "I don't guess Wallace can go on that snipe hunt with us, then. Can he, Paul?"

Paul stopped and came slowly back towards us.

"Snipe hunt?" I said, looking from one to the other of them. "I haven't heard anything about a snipe hunt."

"Yes, sir," Crawford said. "My daddy said next Friday night is the best time in the whole year to catch those old snipe. Didn't I tell you this morning?"

"You didn't tell me a thing," I said.

I'd heard, vaguely, about snipe hunts. I knew it was something pretty fabulous. Hunting was one of the things I nearly always missed out on, anyway, because I couldn't go off that far and stay that long. But, because I'd lied to my friends, I felt a yearning to be with them on this hunt. It would bring us together again like nothing else could.

Paul had rejoined us. "Sure," he said. "We were even going to let you hold the sack."

"How long does it take for a snipe hunt?" I said. They all looked friendly again, and anxious about me missing the fun. "All night, like a 'coon hunt?"

"Nah," Crawford said. "An hour or two. You start just about dusky dark and if you're lucky it doesn't take long at all. If you pick just the right night. And Friday night is the night."

"Then I can go," I said eagerly. "There'll still be plenty of time to take Charlene to the party."

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"She won't want to be late," Paul warned.

"I can make it," I said. "I can do my homework early. Come on, now. Don't cut me out. I've never been on a snipe hunt."

"It'll take three of us to beat them up," Crawford said thoughtfully. "The men are going snipe hunting, too, and if we don't have enough to beat them up, they might catch all the snipe."

"Wouldn't you like to show up at that harvest party with Charlene and a whole sack full of snipe?" Shorty said.

"I guess we'll have to take him," Paul said. "Us three to beat them up, and Wallace to hold the sack."

"How do you hunt snipe, anyway?" I said. "Have any of you ever hunted them?"

"Sure," Crawford said.

"How come you never asked me before, then?"

"You know how it is. You got to hit the right time. And seems like every time the right night came along, you just weren't around."

I felt embarrassment, as I always did when my absences were mentioned. I didn't ever want them to feel that they had to give me special consideration or anything because my father had a bad leg and couldn't do much of the walking and toting work. "You'll have to tell me how to hunt them," I said.

"It's the easiest thing in the world," Crawford said. "Did you ever see how partridges will run along in single file, one right after the other? Well, snipe are the same way. My daddy says snipe have little runs, just like deer trails. You have to pick a cold night, with the moon just right, so they won't want to fly. Then one person stands holding a sack across a snipe trail. The others go out and beat the bushes to move them along that trail. If you're completely still and quiet, they'll come right along and run one by one into the sack. When you've got 'em all, you just close the mouth of the sack, and there you are."

"That seems pretty stupid of the snipe," I said. "It's a wonder they've lasted this long, being so easy to catch."

"You have to be patient," Crawford said. "My daddy says you'll be a wise man by the time you have a sack full of snipe."

So that was why there was so much laughing and talking about snipe hunting. I was relieved to know the facts of the case.

We separated, then, and I went home. I sat on the porch, looking at the general store. Charlene was in there and I knew I had to ask her for that date. I was feeling pretty bad about telling that big lie, and the only way I knew to get out of it was by making it the truth.

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That was the one thing we'd always had between us; we hadn't ever lied to each other, or cheated in any of the games. Sometimes we'd become angry, and fought, but it had been good clean anger and good clean fighting. I knew, sitting there on the porch, why I had been so anxious for the snipe hunt. It was a way of restoring the old open comradeship that we had had before I'd dirtied it with my lying.

I knew what I ought to do. I ought to go and tell them it had been a lie, that they all still had a chance at dating Charlene. But I couldn't bring myself to do it. I was sixteen years old and my picture in the eyes of others was very important to me. I just didn't have the strength to make a clean breast of it.

After a while I walked off the porch and went to the general store. Charlene was there alone.

"Hi, Wallace," she said.

Charlene had turned out pretty. You wouldn't have thought so a year ago when she was wearing a boy's shirt and a pair of blue jeans all the time. She was a small girl, with black hair and eyes. Her eyes laughed all the time, whether her face was laughing or not. You generally felt good around Charlene. But I didn't feel good right then.

"Hi," I said, frowning and jerking the word out. It was hard to say because I didn't know what I'd do after I got it said.

"Where have you been?" she said. "I haven't seen you, except on the school bus, since before school started."

"Around," I said.

A tiny frown came between her eyes for just a moment before it smoothed away. She leaned over the candy counter.

"Are you going to the harvest party, Wallace?" she said. "It's Friday night, you know."

That was my chance. I could say, with just the right touch of casualness, "Sure, Charlene. Why don't you go with me?" and it would be done. I took a deep breath. But those weren't the words that came out.

"Who wants to go to a silly old harvest party," I blurted. "I'm going snipe hunting."

I could feel my face flaming red. I turned and rushed out of the store. I didn't stop until I reached the porch again where I sat down, flustered and out of breath. I'd really blown it all right. She never would give me a date now. And the boys would find out how I had lied.

There are times when the whole world falls in on you. That was one of the times. I'd lost the boys. I'd lost Charlene. And I'd lost myself, too. I tried to justify myself by saying

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that they had the advantage on me because they weren't tied down like I was. But I didn't have much luck with that line of thought.

I still wasn't ready to admit my deceit. I sat on the porch and I worked out a diabolical scheme so they would never know. I would make sure that the snipe hunt would last until the harvest party was over. I'd keep Crawford and Shorty and Paul out there until it was too late and then maybe they wouldn't find out that I had been lying to them. I'd have to make sure that I didn't catch any snipe in that sack. When the snipe came along, I'd make a noise so they'd shy away. They'd have to keep on beating the bushes, no matter how many times they succeeded in running the snipe up to the mouth of the sack.

So I took another step deeper. I couldn't see any other way out. I had to pile scheming on top of lying, not to mention betrayal of the hunt.

Friday night came and I still didn't know anything else to do. I put on a white shirt and a tie, so I'd look like I was going to the party after the snipe hunt. There was a strange kind of excitement in Paul and Crawford and Shorty when I met them. They kept moving around, and laughing for no reason. I was impatient to begin, hurrying them away from the houses before they had a chance to see Charlene.

We went along a path that led through the fields until we came to a broad open sedge grass field a mile or two away. It was grown up waist-high with the yellow sedge grass, with clumps of blackberry briers here and there. We walked silently, except one of the boys would laugh once in a while. Small gullies criss-crossed the terrain and we stopped at one of them.

"Here's a good snipe run," Crawford said. "They go up and down this gully all the time. See how the grass is beaten down?"

"It looks like a rabbit run to me," I said.

"No, sir," Paul said gravely. "That's a snipe run if I ever saw one."

"What do I do, Crawford?" I said.

He took the sack out of my hand. "Like this," he said. He crouched back into the bushes and leaned forward, holding the mouth of the sack over the little path in the bottom of the gully. "Like that," he said. "But you have to be very quiet and still. You can hardly see them when they come, you can just feel them running one by one into the sack."

I squatted down and held the sack, like he had shown me. "O.K.?" I said.

They stood around me, watching critically. Crawford adjusted

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the positioning of the sack an inch or two one way, then an inch or two the other way.

"That ought to do it," he said. "Think you can be quiet enough?"

I looked up at him. "I can spend the night like this, if necessary," I said.

They turned away abruptly, so I couldn't see their faces.

"We'd better hurry, if we're going to make that party, too," Paul said. "You don't want to be late for Charlene."

"Oh, no hurry," I said loftily. "I'd rather catch a sack of snipe any night than date old Charlene."

They walked quickly away, saying they would start far back and beat the field towards me. I was alone. It was just good dusky dark by then and the moon was beginning to rise. I crouched over the snipe trail, holding the sack as I had been shown, and I could hear them shouting thinly at the far edge of the field. I waited tensely, wanting to see the first snipe come along the trail and run into the sack. I had to see that, even if I did mean to scare the others away. I'd see that they beat that field until the party was over.

After a while things began to get quiet. It was quite dark by then. I moved restlessly, then sat still again, thinking I might have scared the snipe after all, whether I'd meant to or not. I looked up at the thin cold sliver of moon, sailing high in the sky. It did not make much light on the world.

An hour passed and I didn't hear a sound. I began to wonder what had happened to the boys. They must have started beating pretty far away. I stood up and looked around the field. I couldn't see much, and I couldn't hear a thing. I squatted down again. One thing was accomplished, anyway. The harvest party was started by now and I was at least accomplishing my purpose in keeping the boys away from it. Snipe hunting must not be the cinch they'd thought it was.

It must have been another hour before the truth began to dawn on me. I began to get cold and miserable, squatting there holding the sack. The misery came from thinking about the party at the school, all the light and the noise, and how I had lied myself right away from enjoying it. And maybe that town boy had made a date with Charlene after all.

While I was sitting there, my mind must have been putting one thing and another together, a remembered bit of talk here, a burst of laughter there. I stood up abruptly, knowing all of the truth about snipe hunting as if I had known it all my life.

I was a fool. I stood there, knowing that I had been a fool.

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That's a hard thing to realise when you're sixteen years old. I threw the sack furiously to the ground, feeling the anger beginning to build up in me. They didn't have the right to take advantage of my ignorance like that. They had never done that before, not since the day my father was hurt. They were at the harvest party, had been for a couple of hours now, laughing and telling about me squatting out here in the darkness holding a sack over a rabbit trail. They'd tell Charlene first of all. I was ready to fight them, all three at the same time if necessary.

I started for them. But I didn't take more than a dozen steps before I stopped. I knew the rest of it, too. I had been made a fool because I had made myself a liar first. If I hadn't lied I wouldn't have trapped myself into the snipe hunt.

Standing there in the cold moonlight, aching from the stiffness of crouching still for so long, I found the meaning of the snipe hunt. It's one of those rituals that bring you face to face with yourself so that you can't avoid the looking, seeing the good and the bad and the in-between. No man—no boy—can spend two or three or four useless hours in a foolish endeavour without learning something about himself, about others. My anger was uncalled for. I did not have the right of anger. My friends had not trapped the fool inside me; I was the only one who could have done that.

I went back and picked up the sack. I smiled wryly at myself as I did so, thinking that I ought to squat down there for the rest of the night, to see if another small truth or two would run up the little path into my opened mind. I figured that I needed it. Maybe somewhere there would be the truth about me and Charlene.

I heard a voice calling my name. I straightened, listening, and then I heard it again. It was Charlene, calling, "Wallace, Wallace," over and over again.

I answered her, then I saw her coming in the scant moonlight across the field. She was wearing a white dress, and she was running. Behind her I could see three dark shapes, running too, and I knew that my friends were coming behind her.

Charlene stopped in front of me. "They really did," she said, her voice panting the words. "I didn't believe it when they told me. They really did send you on a snipe hunt."

"They sure did," I said. "And I fell for it."

Paul and Shorty and Crawford had arrived by then. She turned around towards them. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves," she said furiously. "Making him miss the party. Making him out a fool!"

They hung their heads, looking away from her anger. Then

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Paul lifted his head, moved a step towards me. "I'm sorry, Wallace," he said. "We shouldn't have done it. Just because we were jealous."

"It isn't enough just to apologise," Charlene said. "They knew that because of your father, you . . ."

"Wait a minute;" I said. They all looked at me. I looked back at them across the moonlight, not letting myself turn my face away. "It's not their fault, Charlene. I asked for it. I lied to them. I told them I had a date with you for the harvest party."

I heard Charlene's breath gasp. I saw their faces change as they looked at me, realising the enormity of the lie I had practised on them.

"You . . . told them you had a date with me?" Charlene whispered.

"Yes," I said with as much strength as I could muster. "They wanted to ask you to go with one of us. But I told them I'd already made the date."

She was still looking at me. "That's why you stamped in and out of the store the other day," she said. "I wondered what that was all about. I thought you were mad at me about something."

"I wasn't mad," I muttered. "I . . ."

I couldn't say any more and we stood there, five of us who had been children together and who were now becoming adult together. We looked at each other and we found the old friendship there, and the new strangeness.

"I'm sorry," I said. "The whole thing was my fault. From beginning to end. You can't blame them."

I began to walk away. I didn't feel as badly now, as I had before. I'd at least cleared up the lie I had told. I stopped and looked back at Charlene.

"Did you go with that town boy?" I said.

"Why, no," Charlene said. She laughed a small laugh. "I kept expecting one of you to ask me."

There was a moment of silence. Then we all laughed. It was a fine strong laughter that washed away the fooling and the lying and the shame of our doings. The four of us began to move in on Charlene at the same time, talking about next Wednesday night's meeting. It was suddenly easy to talk about dating; so easy, in fact, she couldn't hear a word we were saying.

She stopped us, laughing. She tilted her head, surveying the four of us. She was lovely, her black head tilted that way in the moonlight, her white dress gleaming.

"I'll have to think about it," she said. "I'll have to make

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up my mind." She smiled at us. "That's what you should have done in the beginning, given a girl a chance to make up her mind."

"Well, who will it be?" Paul said impatiently, after a short pause.

"I don't know yet," she said. "I'll let you know before Wednesday, though."

But I knew. Her hand was on my arm in the darkness, unseen by the others, and when she said the words she squeezed it in one quick warm telling gesture.

I had captured both truth and beauty in the snipe hunt.

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SOME MEN!

Some men, some men
Cannot pass a
Book shop.
(Lady, make your mind up, and wait your life away!)

Some men, some men
Cannot pass a
Crap game.
(He said he'd come at moonrise, and here's another day!)

Some men, some men
Cannot pass a
Bar-room.
(Wait about, and hang about, and that's the way it goes!)

Some men, some men
Cannot pass a
Woman.
(Heaven never send me another one of those!)

Some men, some men
Cannot pass a
Golf course.
(Read a book, and sew a seam, and slumber if you can!)

Some men, some men
Cannot pass a
Haberdasher's.
(All your life your wait around for some damn man!)

DOROTHY PARKER, *Chant for Dark Hours*

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The men in the room had started to unfreeze and move towards us

THE SCAR

BY DARRELL BATES

BELOW the hotel was a waterfall. Beyond the wide deep pool, where the trout cruised and hovered unmolested, the river narrowed into a gorge shouldered with cold misty turf. In the mornings, and whenever I lay waiting for sleep to dull the pain in the side of my head, I heard the sound of water.

They had taken the bandages off my face in the hospital on a Thursday. I hired an old Buick and drove out of the town. It was about sixty miles to the hotel but the road was bad, and the wind and the dust against the new raw skin on the side of my face was stinging and sharp. I drove slowly, unsure of myself and of the old car. It was about an hour from sunset when I got there.

I went straight down to the river and fished until it was dark. The boulders were slippery and as soon as the sun set a chill came down from the mountain. I had been in hospital for about two months, and I felt cold and weak and leaden-footed. I fished hurriedly and badly but, with what I knew would be my last cast, I touched and then hooked a fish. It wasn't much but it was a fish, its spots gleamed even in the half diminished light.

I climbed back to the hotel reassured a little by the fish against the cold, and my weakness. I had no reassurance yet against the ugly newness of my scar.

I lay in the bath for a long time putting off the moment when, to drink and eat, I had to face whoever was staying at the hotel. The doctor had refused to give me my bandages. "You don't need them any more. The air and the sun must have a chance now to heal the scars properly. Anyway you've got to face people with them. Don't put it off. Start now."

When I walked into the bar there were only two people there: an elderly tweeded fishing man and his wife, an elderly tweeded knitting woman, were drinking South African whisky. They didn't say anything when I came in.

The servant at the bar was a Nandi from the north of Kenya. I talked to him.

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He didn't say anything about my face, even with his eyes. In the end I told him about it.

I went on drinking after the couple had gone in to dinner. When at last I got off the high stool at the bar I slipped and nearly fell. The barman came quickly round to help me. "Pole, bwana," he said. Somewhere he had learnt to speak good Swahili. His name was Aroki.

I sat at a table near the fire. It was only when I was halfway through dinner that I saw the girl sitting by herself against the wall at the far end of the room. She was reading a book, propped in front of her like a barrier against the rest of the room.

Some old leather chairs had been grouped by the fireplace. The tweeded couple had established themselves there by the time I had finished the meal. They were playing bezique. Later I talked to the man about the fishing. The girl joined the group while we were talking, but she sat apart on a wooden bench along the side of the large open fireplace. As soon as the old couple left she got up from the bench and followed them out.

She had left her book on the bench. I went across and looked at it. It was a paper-backed edition of Steinbeck's *The Pastures of Heaven*.

Later she came back for it. When she saw me she hesitated and turned to go.

I said, "Here is your book. You left it here."

She took it quickly, not looking at me. Her "Thank you" was so low that I could scarcely hear it. As she went I called her. My voice was glazed with the whisky and the warmth of the fire, and edged with anger and self-pity.

"Is my face as bad as all that?"

I knew it was a mean, ugly thing to say.

She walked another pace and then stopped, her back towards me. She put her head sideways on her shoulder and stared at the windows along the end of the room. I saw her mouth moving but I heard nothing. In the end she turned her head away again and ran the few steps out of the room.

Aroki was still in the bar polishing glasses.

I asked him about the old couple.

"He is a Major, bwana. He has a property with coconut trees on the coast. Every year he comes here to fish. He and the memsahib. He stays two, three weeks. He catches many fish."

"And the girl?" I asked.

"I don't know. She came here last month. She is sad about something, I think. She helps in the hotel.

"And you, bwana," he asked, "are you finished with the fighting?"

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" No. When this is better I will go back. It is ugly but it is nothing."

" Thanks be to God," said Aroki, in Arabic.

My head was very painful that night. I lay in the bed listening to the waterfall and the stream and couldn't sleep.

Although I had heard no sound I suddenly knew there was somebody in the corridor outside. I lay tensed, listening for some movement, but I could hear nothing. My heart hammered with the beginnings of a small fear, the sort of fear that came easily in Kenya then. I eased myself slowly out of the bed and crossed to the door. I opened it quickly.

Huddled against the wall opposite was the girl. As the door opened she started to move away. I caught her arm. I held her roughly against the wall and knew I was hurting her. I was angry because of my fear. Her arm was thin and insubstantial like the wing of a small bird.

She stopped pulling away and stood quietly, inert, like something caught by a peg on a washing-line.

There was a light at the end of the corridor, but here it was all shadows. Her face was a pale blur beneath large dark eyes, ringed themselves with shadows.

" What is it? " I said. I spoke quietly now.

She just shook her head.

" Tell me, please." I was being as gentle as I could. The anger and the fear had gone out of me.

Her mouth moved, but I couldn't hear what she said. She tried again.

" I couldn't bear you to think . . ."

Her voice was like a mist. I waited for her to try again.

In the end I said, " Do you mean about my face? "

She nodded her head. She still wouldn't look at me.

" I'm glad," I said. " It was nice of you to tell me."

I let go her arm, but she stayed where she was, pressed against the wall.

" Now go to bed or I will beat you."

I watched her run down the corridor. Her feet were bare. At the end under the light she turned for a moment. Then she opened a door and disappeared.

The next day was a bad day. It rained all the morning. Before lunch I sat in the bar drinking gin with the Major. Afterwards I tried to sleep and couldn't.

It started to rain again in the evening, but I went out, and fished upstream this time. I slipped on the rocks and cut my ankle.

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That night I lay awake for a long time.

The Major and his wife had been in the bar before dinner. He had been out all day in the rain and had caught a dozen trout. I had caught nothing.

I had seen the Major's wife look furtively at my scar over her glasses, then lean across and whisper to her husband. Neither at dinner nor afterwards did the girl appear.

The next day was a fine day. The light in the early morning was clean and brilliant. Everything was clear-cut and hard. In the crevices and shadows of the grey rocks at the top of Mount Kenya there were streaks and patches of snow.

I went upstream again, climbing along the path through the forest above the river's gorge until the trees thinned and finally ended. Here the country was open with short stubby grass and clumps of giant heath. The river ran cold and clear through shallow grassed banks and to cast one had to stand well back from the edge.

Between eleven and one that morning I caught nine trout. They were all just over or below a pound, and one, with the underslung jaw of the cannibal, was well over two.

In a hollow of the river bank I ate the chicken and bread and cheese and apples that the people at the hotel had given me. I lit a pipe, and lay content on the rough yielding grass. I could feel the air, thinned and cooled by the nine thousand feet of altitude, and warmed by the sun in the cloudless sky, soothing and healing the scars on my cheek and jaw.

That evening in the bar I found a friend of mine. We had been in the same Brigade in the fighting. He was with a girl and they had come out for the day from the town. She had deep blue eyes against clear unstained, unshadowed whites and a lovely wide, generous mouth without lipstick or guile.

She sat quietly sipping her beer while we talked. Robert knew about my wound. We knew and liked one another and he asked at once how it was.

"It looks fine," he said. "Why are you hiding yourself out here?"

"I like fishing."

I got them another drink. When I gave the beer to the girl, she said, "Do you mind if I look at the scar? I was a nurse."

They were both trying to put me at ease, to make me used to the fact of my scar.

"They've done it very well, haven't they?" she said. "Do you mind it being touched?"

"I don't know," I replied. "I can touch it myself but . . ."

"Let me try," she said.

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It felt all right when she touched it. She was being deliberately impersonal about it. There was no flinching in her eyes when she looked or when she touched. I liked her very much.

" Robert, I like your girl. Do you mind if I ask her an awkward question? "

" No. Ask her. But I warn you, she is usually devastatingly honest."

" Yes, I thought she probably was."

Robert said, laughing, " Do you want me to go? "

To the girl I said, " Does it look terrible? "

I watched her eyes while she was speaking.

" It's a terrible scar. Yes. Whatever it was must have split your face half open. It makes one catch one's breath but it doesn't offend or—" she searched for a word—" repel."

" You're a nurse. You're used to this sort of thing."

" I'm also a girl."

There were a lot of people in the bar that night. Sitting on stools in the corner were two men. One was large and fleshy. He was noisily drunk. The other man was a short dapper townsman in a pinstriped suit.

One asked, " Are there any women in this dump? "

The dapper townsman replied, " No. Not a sausage."

" Hey," said the fleshy one in English to Aroki behind the bar. " You big baboon." Then in execrable Nairobi Swahili, " You got a sister or anything? "

Aroki just said, " No, bwana."

" Silly black bastard."

Aroki's face was expressionless.

I didn't like these men. I didn't like people who talked like that to bar-boys. I could feel the anger rising inside me like vomit. I got up and went across.

" Don't talk to him like that."

The man said, " Aw, shut up." But he got off the stool and soon afterwards the two of them went through into the dining-room.

I stayed in the bar until everyone else had gone. As I got up to go Aroki said, " Bwana—"

" Yes," I said. " What is it? "

" Nothing, bwana, nothing . . . but thank you."

In the dining-room there were about a dozen people. Some of them were still eating. Others were sitting or standing round the fire. I saw that the girl was sitting by herself in the corner on the wooden bench. The two men were drinking brandy, laughing too loudly, taking up too much of the fire.

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The townsman moved across to the girl. I couldn't hear what he was saying but I saw the girl shake her head. He said something across the fireplace to the fleshy man and they both laughed. The girl got up to go and the townsman put his hand on her shoulder and forced her down. Then he took the book she had been reading out of her hand. He started reading aloud from it in a high affected voice.

As I got up my chair slipped over behind me and fell with a clatter. Everyone stopped talking, knives and forks were held suspended—frozen in a silence that could be heard all over the room. I walked across to the fireplace. I took the book out of the townsman's hands and gave it to the girl. I caught the two lapels of his coat and told him to get out.

The only sound in the room was the sound of the waterfall outside. The only movement was the flickering of the flames in the log fire.

The large fleshy man was more drunk than before and more courageous. Suddenly in a loud thick voice he laughed.

" Why, it's old scar-face again. Why the hell don't you cover it up? You look like a poor bloody cat that's been run over by a bloody bus. And why the hell don't you mind your own business? "

He struck down at my hands with his arm. I pushed the small pinstripe suit away from me into a chair and faced the fleshy man.

He had pulled out a length of bicycle chain. I wasn't surprised; this was in Kenya where almost everyone carried something, just in case . . . I could see it glinting in the firelight in his hand. He stood drunk and large and sure of himself, waiting for me to move. Then with a quick movement the girl picked a flaming piece of wood from the fire and struck at the man's hand. The chain fell with a metallic jar on the floor. He swore crudely and fiercely.

" Get out," said the girl. Her voice was cracked and high-pitched and frightened. " Get out or I'll put it in your eyes."

The dapper man was on his feet again and moving towards the girl. I hit him savagely across the face.

I saw that Aroki was in the doorway. He had a bottle in his hand. Some of the men in the room had started to unfreeze and move towards us.

" Come on. Let's get out of this madhouse." The big man took his companion by the arm. As he passed me he said, " You bastard, you."

I made to hit him, but the girl held my arm.

Aroki watched the men as they went towards the door. They

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hesitated a moment. Then they went out into the darkness.

The tension and silence stayed in the room until the car started and swept out of the yard with a screech of tyres and a flurry of gravel.

A low murmur of sound made up of hushed voices and small movements spread over the room. Aroki turned and went back to the bar.

The girl let go of my arm. She picked up her book and ran quickly, head down, out of the room.

It was a long time before I left the room. I sat on the wooden bench staring into the fire. My head was hurting and I knew I couldn't sleep. One or two people tried to speak to me, but I didn't want to talk . . .

There was no reply, no movement when I first knocked. I knocked again and her voice came faintly through the door.

"Who is it?"

"It's me," I said. She didn't know my name.

There was a long pause. Then I heard her bare feet coming slowly across the room. She unlocked the door and opened it about a foot.

She didn't say anything, but she stared up into my face. She had never looked directly at me before.

"I came to say thank you."

Her mouth moved, but she said nothing.

Not to scare her, not to break the fine cord that seemed to bind us for this small moment, I moved my hand slowly and she watched it move out of the corner of her eyes, the whites showing in alarm until it went past and behind her to rest on the back of her head.

I leaned towards her, slowly still, and kissed her at the corner of her small pale mouth.

"Good night," I said.

She shut the door. I heard the key turn in the lock. There was no sound of bare feet on the cedar boards inside the room and I knew she was leaning against the door . . .

The next day it rained again. But in the evening it cleared and I went to fish the stream below the waterfall. As I was crossing the yard, I met the girl carrying some blankets. As I passed her, she smiled and said, "Hullo." It was the first time she had behaved like an ordinary person.

On an impulse I said, "I'm going fishing for an hour. Would you like to come?"

The pause was a very small one.

"Yes," she said. "Yes, I would."

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" I'll wait for you over there."

When she joined me by the bridge she was wearing a vivid scarlet sweater, square across the shoulders, and a pair of jeans. They were very faded and worn.

She saw me looking at her clothes.

" I thought we might get wet."

" I like your sweater," I said.

She coloured a little. I had not seen her like this before.

While I fished, standing behind a bush a little above the river, she knelt on the grass beside me. Suddenly she put her hand on my arm and said, " Look! Over there."

She pointed to the pool above us, below a small irregular fall of rock. Crossing it in swift liquid movements was a thin whip-snake, its pale green skin shining against the water.

She was watching it, a small frown on her face but relaxed and untensed.

" Most girls are frightened of snakes."

The snake had disappeared into the bushes on the other side.

" I'm not like other girls."

It was said seriously and quietly, and I didn't reply.

Later on I cast down into another pool and gave the rod to her.

Almost at once there was a quick flurry in the water. She jerked the rod, as she had seen me do, and hooked him. It was a lovely lively fish and more than anything in the world at this moment I wanted her to have him. He was making for the far side of the river where the bank overhung. I told her to go through the bushes up the bank and keep him away from the other side. I went straight into the river with the net and at the fourth attempt I caught him.

Kneeling again behind the bush we looked at the fish. I showed her how to hold him from underneath with her fingers in the gills and take the hook out. I made her kill him with a stone at the base of his head and then I strung it through the mouth and the gills on a reed and gave it to her to carry.

" Now it's really your fish."

" Oh, I'm so pleased," she said. She was like a child with unaffected, unconcealed excitement.

As we got up to go back to the hotel I saw that she had scratches on her arm from the thorny bushes. I took her fingers and wiped the blood from the back of her hand and wrist. Her arm was small like a child's, fragile and thin to hold. I turned it over and then caught my breath.

" Did you do that last night? "

" Yes."

Across the palm was the scar of a raw stark burn.

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Neither of us had said anything for some time. I found I was still holding her burnt hand.

" It will be all right, and I," she said, " I'm all right now too."

I thought I knew what she meant. But I wanted to be sure.

" Well," she explained, in answer to my question, " I've never been any good at anything. I've never fitted in. I've always been the odd one out, the one who was different, the one who failed at home and at school, and at jobs and—" She looked at me with wide guileless eyes—" and at everything.

" After a bit," she went on, " that sort of oddness, that sort of failure, gets one down. One loses one's self-confidence. One retires into a shell . . . But last night, doing something, being some use, somehow gave me confidence. And catching that fish . . ." Her eyes were still guileless, and her fingertips on my scar when she reached up her hand were cool and healing . . .

" And you," she said, " are you all right? "

I said, " Yes, I am all right now."

We didn't say anything more as we walked back up the path. The dusk was nearly gone and beyond us we could see the lights in the windows. At the top of the path where it left the trees she turned and waited for me.

We crossed the clearing, and came up the steps to the hotel, each swinging a fish on the end of its halter of reed.

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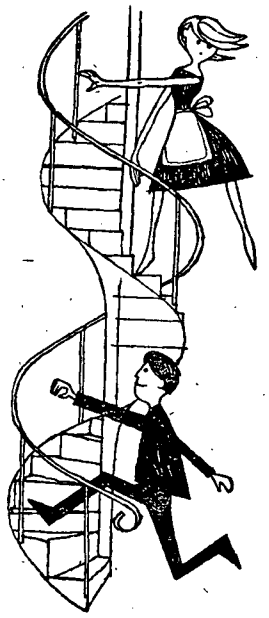

UP THE WOODEN HILL

Maggie !
Yes, Ma ?
Come right upstairs.
Maggie !
Yes, Ma ?
Them stairs ain't chairs !

ANON

Now grimy April comes again,
Maketh bloom the fire-escapes,
Maketh silvers in the rain,
Maketh winter coats and capes
Suddenly all worn and shabby
Like the fur of winter bears,
Maketh kittens, maketh baby,
Maketh kissing on the stairs.

STEPHEN VINCENT BENET, *For City Spring*

High Descent

Did not the Abbé F-M say: " Lost is that man who sees a beautiful woman descending a noble staircase? " and were not both these ingredients here, and ready to her hand? What else but a staircase could so perfectly set off the jewel she had made of Elfine . . .?

All eyes were turned upon the staircase. A low hum of admiration, the most delightful sound in the world that a woman's ears can receive, rose into the stillness. The slow descent of this young girl down the staircase was like the descent of a sunlit cloud down the breast of a mountain. Her candid beauty, set off by the snowy-silver folds of her simple dress, refreshed the dancers who stood silently looking up at her as the sight of a cluster of flowers or a moonlit expanse of sea refreshes the eyes.

STELLA GIBBONS, *Cold Comfort Farm*

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Treads and risers

Now when I stand upon the stair alone
And listen, I can hear a quiet stir
Like even breathing, or a whispered drone,
A sound that any little noise would blur.

I knew that there is something in this hall,
That climbs the waiting stairs and then goes down
On silent feet, or clings hard to the wall,
As though it loved the old and faded brown.

Sometimes I feel that I, myself, can fly
If I stand very still upon the stair,
Believing that there is no reason why
I cannot trust my body to the air . . .

CAROLYN HALL, *A Child upon the Stair*

Slip on the stairway

I picked up my skirt in my hands. Then the sound of the drum echoed in the great hall, startling me for a moment, who had waited for it, who knew that it would come. I saw them look up surprised and bewildered, from the hall below.

" Miss Caroline de Winter," shouted the drummer.

I came forward to the head of the stairs and stood there, smiling, my hat in my hand, like the girl in the picture. I waited for the clapping and the laughter that would follow as I walked slowly down the stairs. Nobody clapped, nobody moved.

They all stared at me like dumb things. Beatrice uttered a little cry, and put her hand to her mouth. I went on smiling, I put one hand on the banister.

" How do you do, Mr. de Winter," I said.

Maxim had not moved. He stared up at me, his glass in his hand. There was no colour in his face. It was ashen white . . .

DAPHNE DU MAURIER, *Rebecca*

In an empty house

But only a host of phantom listeners
That dwelt in the lone house then
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight
To that voice from the world of men:
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair
That goes down to the empty hall,
Hearkening in an air stirred and shaken
By the lonely Traveller's call . . .

WALTER DE LA MARE, *The Listeners*

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The man with the moon in him

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BY WILLIAM SANSOM

A FULL moon would soon be rising to shed a cool brilliance over our hot, aching, summer city.

Somewhere across the night of the world it waited to edge up over the rooftops, first a birth of light in the sky, then a thin gold rump mounting above roofs and chimneys swimming towards it, finally the enormous and splendid low-hung lantern itself.

People would stand at open windows and gaze at it, watching it "rise," never thinking that it was instead they who dizzily descended round towards it, themselves for ever falling away. Lovers in the parks would stare entranced, feeling its platinum heat burn in their veins, watching its light drip white on the buildings like a warm summer-night snow.

But the moon is not only beautiful, it has other strengths. Its terrible pull alters each month the shape of whole oceans. Millions of tons of salt wet water go creeping up and down the world as from somewhere, radiant and invisible, it pulls. Just as, like a restless sleep, it pulls at the smaller tides in human veins.

And just as, at five o'clock in the afternoon, long before it rose, still unseen and unknown, it pulled at the veins of a lonely young man in a raincoat deep beneath the earth in the tiled passages of the underground.

He was alone. He was so alone that he might not have had a name. The name was written down in many registers, on letters and on small bills, and inside the greasy collar of his mud-coloured raincoat, and even on the register of one of Her Majesty's preventive institutions—Les Baynes. But on this summer night, with no girl, no friends, no money and no home, he might have had neither name nor identity. Hundreds of people passed him by but no one noticed him. He might not have been there.

But he was indeed there, and in many ways his presence was more powerful than usual. The moon knew he was there. He was strangely excited and overconscious of himself. He felt strong and daring. He had spent his last threepence coming down on to the underground platforms here—wisely, wisely, his mind told him.

He stood against the white tiles, by the slot machines and a line of cinema advertisements, on the up-line platform. At this time of the afternoon the platform was fairly empty. Not many people were yet travelling up to the West End. On the other side it was different—those who had left their work early were swelling the down-trains and a growing swarm of footsteps echoed from the escalator hall. But his side was left empty.

It lay in a separate tunnel. Single people sometimes wandered

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in and stood apart, facing the big curved advertisements across the line. The suave dark metal live-rail quietly beckoned from the pit in the centre. But nobody liked to look at this for long—they looked away to left or right, or at advertisements. They looked ill at ease: and because they were few, they looked also as lonely as he was. He could stand them like that. It was not the same as above, in the streets, where everybody seemed bent on some purposeful, companionable errand, all except him.

On the five o'clock empty platform, tiled and hard as a bright lavatory, clean and dry as the inside of a giant porcelain gun-barrel, with the hot smell swerving in from tunnels, with the sound of trains themselves like a blast of thunderous air pushing in from the dark hole at the end—on this platform there stood three people as well as the young man. A painted-up girl in light-coloured clothes; pink angora, a short white skirt, high white shoes under darker stockings. Farther on, a man in creased grey, bowlered and sober; with a worn briefcase, a parcel, unpolished shoes. Farther still, a negro in a pale suit—in that tubular bluish light looking oddly out of context, like a man in a negative photograph.

The young man in the raincoat—he was Irish-looking, with upstanding oiled black hair, blue eyes rimmed with short dark lashes, a raw red skin that had stepped straight off the bog or out of the pub, either—the young man glanced over these figures, found the men gloomy and innocuous, and fixed his eyes on the girl.

"Tart," he muttered out loud. "Going up West, starting early." Then he saw she carried a small square make-up case: "Strip-tease," he corrected himself.

From far along the tunnel came the first growling of a train. He had his eyes on the girl. He felt vaguely possessive—there she was private in her clothes who would be publicly naked. His excitement mounted. In the pocket of his coat he gripped something, getting it ready. The two other men stepped back from the platform edge.

He looked quickly over his shoulder across the escalator space to the other platform to see if the coast was clear. Sometimes not all the passengers went up the stairs, sometimes someone had passed his station and came through to take the opposite train back, sometimes some idiot bumpkin thought it was a junction and came wandering about looking for somewhere or other. But now it was empty there, no train. Yet perhaps a train was coming in now? Perhaps its noise was covered by the close roar of his own train which he could see surging round the bend of the tunnel, hard, busy, hungry, its red hammer-head bursting out small then suddenly tall as it ranged to a stop along the platform? Like a suddenly tamed beast it stood there shivering its whole long red flank and with a sighing hiss opened empty glass doors.

But no train came in on the other side; and no one got out here.

The girl, the grey-suited man, the negro—all three walked in. The doors closed, the engine gathered itself, rattling to a start—and then the whole immense enterprise groaned off, big thing gone

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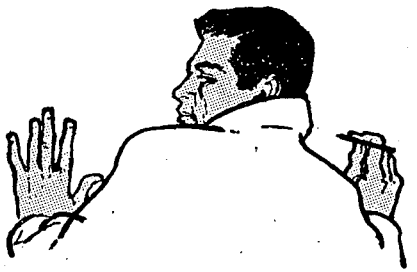

suddenly small away in the tunnel hole, and the young man was left alone.

This was his moment . . .

With a last glance over the other side—still empty—he drew his hand and the pencil-stub from his pocket and swung round on the wall. Gripping the stub hard and awkwardly between finger and thumb, he wrote quickly on the white space of an advertisement a single big-lettered obscene word. His lips moved as he wrote. He wrote quickly, as if he were swallowing down food—and then he heard from over the way the first whisper of another train. He took a risk, reached out and scrawled the word again huge on the next poster, pale pencil-lead among the dark print of film actors' and directors' and distributors' names. "That'll show the bleeders," he lipped, and his mouth hung open greedy as an animal's.

But he was not pitting his strength at these film people—he was addressing the world, everybody, with their high-sniffing noses and their lifted eyebrows, their restrictions, their society, their NO.

As the first people alighted from the train on the other side, he had the pencil-stub back in his pocket, dropping it loose like a sweet, avoiding it guiltily although it was deep in his own dark pocket. He sidestepped quickly to the machines and pretended to read what was offered: but then moved away in case someone might think he was tampering with them.

He stood on the weighing machine and looked hard at the arrow not registering his weight.

He bubbled hotly inside himself as he heard the people patter off up and away. Perhaps there'd be another chance to do it before the next train came in?

There was. And he went through the whole operation several more times, as several more trains came and went—the alert, the attack, success and the sweet secret guilt.

The guilt—and the cleverness: he was up to all the tricks, he knew when there were cleaners about, he could hear the clank of a pail and a mop a hundred feet off as the old girl in dark blue slacks and her pink satin blouse, hair done up tall in a turban like a Brixton-Jamaica mammy, came clacking along on floodhigh heels. And along at each end of the platform those polished wood doors

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could always hide a supervisor, he was up to that too, he didn't want old grim-face coming asking questions. So he kept a close eye on those doors while he waited for a train to pass.

But he always found time to glance back proud at his own work, the pitiful pale lead scrawl among such heavily printed names. It never looked pale or pitiful to him. He only chose the white spaces, where it stood out clear—some old probationer fool had once told him he didn't really want to write the words, he only wanted to make his mark on the space, and so what? If you wanted to write a word you didn't choose a written-on piece, did you? Only this old misery had kept on saying no it was the other way round, you didn't want to write the word at all, you wanted to fill the space and the word was what came to your mind, like people write their names. Well, and so what?

Thinking this, which always got him furious, for when they give you a sensible reason for things, it chips a bit off the pleasure somewhere—he waited for the next train to draw out and then swung sharply round on a poster with a big girl in a low-cut dress glaring her teeth out from a frame of red balloon lips, and he saw enough white space there in the picture of the girl, not on her bosom so carefully shaded but right in her teeth, and he stabbed with the stub at her teeth, and stabbed so hard he lost his grip on the pencil, it shot from his hand, he jerked back to catch it and only hit it hard with his hand like a racket and the stub went flying away through the air to fall on the platform, to roll winking on the dark grey stone surface to dribble across the white line, and—he saw it with his heart heaved into his mouth—hover wobbling for a second before falling over into the pit. He ran forward after it—then stopped himself just in time, swaying on the edge like a man on a cliff.

The pencil lay down near a purple sweet-carton, a piece of oiled rag, a torn newspaper. Its polish winked up at him from the dirt. It lay quite near the platform edge on his side of the first rail. The live-voltage rail was raised a good foot or two off, above the deeper pit. It was his only pencil. Could a man get down there, lie full length, without a train hitting him? Wheels, flanges—safer in the deeper pit like a coffin under the polished steel? But could it be risked—he looked skilfully up and down the platform—between trains?

Chamber-pots, he thought, looking at the china insulators, rows of pots, and half-hating, half-loving, he giggled. Like many other people he had wondered about this before, in a way desiring it; and now he was already down on one knee on the very edge, on the white line and peering down before his heart began thumping, a shiver of fear emptied the soles of his feet, and he drew back—just as a voice boomed hollow along the tiled tube, " Keep away from that line; what's up, lost something? "

A peak-capped figure was hurrying towards him from the end of the platform, but still a long way away, and his clever guiltiness stood him smartly up to wave, shake his head, and stroll carefully at ease off into the arch towards the escalator. Once out of sight he

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ran, and ran right up the escalator so that when the official reached the bottom he was well out of reach and call.

At the top he gave up his ticket—wondering for a moment whether he could claim his threepence back. But now he was too excited. He saw freedom ahead in the sunlit archway. And gloating on what he had done and on the narrowness of escape, he hurried out from the smell of tiles and stale air into the summer evening.

But round the first corner he stopped. He felt the letdown coming on. The evening air was stale as the tube. He had a muffling and swelling in his head like a hangover. A big emptiness bit inside like a drinker's wish for more drink—and his hands scratched at the emptiness in his pockets.

It was a small thing gone, a mean stub of wood and lead. But it was irreplaceable. And it would be absolutely impossible to get a pencil for nothing in the whole length of that busy street. In everybody's pocket and purse there were pencils. Pencils no one would give a second thought to. Yet there was no legitimate way of getting these pencils away from people. You might borrow one, pretend to make a note, stop a passer-by—but the owner of that negligible length of wood and graphite would stand waiting. The post offices had only pens. The pencils in the employment exchange were chained. You might borrow a pencil from someone and run—but that was asking for trouble. And he hated trouble, or more deeply he feared trouble, feared even effort and risk of any kind; it was indeed this fear of facing things that had conditioned him into secret and sideways ways, into peering through windows, into writing secretly on walls. In the smallest matters, he avoided a straight approach. He hated facing eyes. With girls, for instance, he found difficulty in going through with the ordinary bantering approach. His secret thoughts were too big to let him face their eyes.

The feeling of great pity for himself came on, he was near to tears as he stood and watched the people pass, all with somewhere to go, something to do—all seeming to have come to terms with the evening. Only himself in all the world left out. The sun was falling towards six o'clock—still high, but past its prime of afternoon, it cast a lost and weary light over the street of buses and vans and cars and people. At this point, before evening, things seemed to have lost their sparkle, it was an in-between time, it echoed back the old days when it was time to leave the dazzling play streets and go to wash before supper, when the smell of dust and asphalt was still sweet but somehow used up, tired as his tired feet.

He stood there empty as this empty time of day. He yearned for even an hour ago, as if this were all the past. He put all the blame on that pencil. He looked up the street, at the mixed red and brown and concrete-grey buildings, at all the mess of wire and lamps and poster, at the traffic and the Odeon and the red Woolworth's and turned away. It all looked so sour and stale, the

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well-known dull buildings, the street of people. He turned and walked in the other direction to where the Common, yellow with clay and scrubbed with gorse, straggled right down to the pavement. He walked up a path between gorse bushes to where a thicket of may trees huddled together to make a paper-strewn urban grove.

The sounds of summer traffic came singing, a confused music like the metal echo of water-pipes. Through the dusty leaves he saw the far blue sky. He stood there not knowing what to do—craving to do something. Although it was so warm that the undergrowth smelled—of dead grass and metal and dust and petrol—nevertheless he still wore that raincoat, hot and sweat-sour, damp beneath the arms. It was a kind of protection, an anonymity. He stood and looked down at an old white and blue-rimmed jug, patched with rusted iron where the enamel had chipped. He kicked it over. It made no sound. The earth was too dull even to bring a ring from an old tin. He turned and walked away. The heat in his head ached, he felt he could break inside for excitement. But excitement for what? He was surrounded only by the dead desolate Common, by the suburb pretending to live.

Houses were built right up against the edge of the Common here. He walked down the hard clay path, ridged with old rain rivulets, to where the dung-brown brick garden walls rose. He stood in the shadow of a tree and looked up at the windows. Perhaps some girl back from the office was changing for the evening, for the dance. He heard the sound of plates being washed. A radio talked out the news, wide and loud, like the voice of a man in a huge hall. Lace curtains, blackness between, faced him over the roof of a shed. Slate roofs above; and above them, that vague yearning of a sky. It was all pitilessly still.

The sun somewhere behind him fired into bright gold one of the closed glass windows. Jewel-bright, sadly westering, it threw into emphasis all the tired brick around. The housebacks rose in a grim terrace against the blue above—never, never would they move, they were set in their etched dull check of brick like dead houses buried in a steel engraving, they grated with a despair of the past, and something in the sight of them pulled harder at that man's inside already pulled by the moon, something which set the craving higher than ever. But a craving for what? He did not know. So it became a girl.

He turned away and walked down the slight slope back to the High Street. The suburban pall faced him—just enough brightness in the new shops, in two cinemas, in a fried fish shop and a restaurant and two large corner licensed houses and a radio shop flickering silent television screens, just enough brightness in all this to tempt—but so many miles away from the West End where these things were set packed tight together, street after street, satisfying, available.

A group of young men were strolling by, special haircuts, white shirts, boasting suits. They talked loudly, impressing each other.

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They were less intent on looking for a girl than on impressing themselves on the world, on stirring things up. In this they looked dangerous. But they were in control. They were not like Baynes, edging by, dull against their brightness, a mud-coloured shadow of a man with the moon in him.

He glanced up shiftily as they went by, waited for them to pass before he spat. Then he saw the tail of a queue outside the fish shop—and a pair of high red heels.

As his eyes saw them his feet went forward—he was cutting along the pavement to stand in the queue exactly behind this woman with the shoes, his chin a few inches only from the rolled back of her hair. He smelled her scent, the soapy scent of an English bedroom, mixed with the summer scent of her, warm girl, yearning out to him.

The queue shuffled forward. He kept close behind. People now pressed close against his back—but he kept away from the girl, so conscious of her that to touch would have seemed designed and if she turned to make some simple complaint, "Don't push," he might panic with guilt. So he kept back.

Yet she knew. His breath, his breathing? Or just his presence, his hot mind penetrating the back of her head? Once she turned round, glanced quickly up—and in that glance perhaps saw only health in his red face and thick black upstanding hair, for a second later her hand came up to the back of her hair to put it straight. He noticed on one white finger, young and thin and innocent, a meagre ring with a cheap and very small false gem; it looked pitifully cheap, humble; he wanted to smash it.

People came out with fish wrapped in paper, and now nearly inside the shop the smell of fry overcame the girl's scent: and with this some of her presence went, he woke up to the fact that he was in a queue and penniless. He read NO PLAICE TONIGHT on a blackboard and saw he could ask for this when his turn came. But they might have one portion left? They might keep him hanging there waiting while they looked for it and the girl escaped? He stepped from the queue, pretending to shake his head regretfully at the notice, and left the shop.

Next door was a photographer's. He stood looking at photographs of wedding groups, brushed-up grooms with touched-up faces, and brides who had lost their figures in big white wedding dresses as if anticipating what was to come—bright pathetic couples enjoying their moment before the years of toil and words, but now to Baynes simply pictures of people who had banded together, who were on the side of order and restraint and all the social niceties that said NO. He swore at them, just moving his wet lips, and kept a sideways eye on the fish shop.

The girl came out and turned his way. His insides paled. He thought she was going to speak to him—but she went past. He turned to walk casually after her. Now he kept near in to the shop windows. He kept his head down—but his eyes were still on her, looking up under the lids like dead eyes. She walked not fast but

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with decision, in the centre of the pavement, the set of her heels jolting her whole body busily.

She rounded the last shop in the line and turned up on to the Common. His mouth fell open with surprise.

She was walking exactly where he had come from! He grasped at the coincidence of this. It was commanded, it was fate—and with the certainty that superstition brings, he hurried faster after her, seeing clearly the grove of dark may trees higher up through which she must pass.

At that time of day there were few people on the Common. People coming home from work took the main asphalted path away to the right: and it was yet too early for evening strollers to walk out on this quieter path, a kind of lovers' lane, that ran along near the row of high garden walls. Yet everywhere the signs of trampling humanity were scattered—initials chalked on the walls, a scattering of cigarette cartons, and whole sheets of blown newspaper, and this litter gave the place a more deserted look. A great crowd had come and gone and would never return.

He was beginning to breathe fast. He took care to walk away from the path, taking a roundabout way over the grass. He had thus to walk twice as fast, on that warm evening with his raincoat stale and muffling its own rubber heat round him. He could only see the girl's back. Of this, what he saw markedly was the waist, slender between shoulders and hips, the place where she might snap—and then also he saw the slightly bent forward set of her shoulders, not broad, but young and weak, so that they seemed in their thin fragility to call for protection, and at the same time for its opposite, hurting and crushing.

She disappeared behind a straggle of bush growing higher towards the may-grove. He took a last quick look round. He saw from a long way off a man standing and possibly watching him—but this only aggravated, made him act with greater speed, so that now breaking into a run but quiet, quiet on his toes, bending low on long knees, he passed after her into the earth-smelling shadow of the may.

Tangled, disordered, shapeless, these trees nevertheless cut out the day, they made a place of shade privately their own. It was quiet inside, quiet as the dead smell of last year's sodden autumn leaves and the silent ring of that rusted, mud-bedded enamel jug.

He leapt at her from behind, clutching with both arms, swinging her round to face him. She made no sound but for a little sob deep inside her open mouth. The fish in its newspaper fell squashed between them. He butted her face up with his chin and looked close into her eyes.

They stared up at him neither frightened nor furious nor even surprised—they stared up unresisting, soft eyes looking a long way into him and beyond.

Her mouth had fallen a little open, she seemed to be pressing herself against him, giving to him. He swung out one arm from

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her shoulder to hit her in the face, to blot out her eyes. She stared up at him with the innocence of a child about to be struck—when the child has trusted yet faces a sudden wind of anger, and is all wonder at this, held at ease in a moment of suspended curiosity, but not detached, rather in some way most attached with all the strange love of victim for assailant.

His hands dropped to his sides. All he had wanted had fallen flat into soft pulp. How to impress himself on what was soft and unresisting? On what would not wrestle itself away from his strength. On what in fact had ceased to be there at all . . .?

He was suddenly jolted aware of the real fact of standing with a girl in his arms in a straggle of trees, and realised now that it was her bag she was pressing at him, and from her lips there was indeed a word coming.

"Take . . . take . . ."

He did not know what to do or to say and pulled from the cloud of his mind the first thing that came to it.

"A pencil . . . could you please lend me . . . a pencil?" before she fell, in a dead faint, to the ground.

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CASE IN CODE

THE CASE OF THE MISSING IOUs

"Lew" Louis was a big-time gambler who couldn't meet the IOUs he gave Solly Jaks. So he stole them back one night, leaving Solly dead over his diary. The last entry read :

L S L S T H S F F T H T H . T H S N G H T M S T
N S S T F R M L Y B T N N C S L Y F R T H N K L
S M G H T K L L F P S H H M T M C H

Detective Inspector Bassett soon read the outline of the straightforward message and shortly afterwards charged Lew with murder. "I think Solly *did* push you too much, Lew," he said.

D. PENN-BULL *Solution next month*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD
on page 136

Across. 1, *Chittagong.* 6, *A fen.* 9, *Dimensions.* 10, *Siam.* 12, *Grilse.* 15, *Try-on.* 18, *User.* 19, *Bronco.* 21, *Udall.* 22, *Analyst.* 24, *Roger.* 25, *Astern.* 26, *Mobs.* 28, *Genoa.* 29, *Assisi.* 34, *Noon.* 35, *Psittacine.* 36, *Lean.* 37, *Strong meat.*

Down. 1, *Cede.* 2, *Iamb.* 3, *Tuner.* 4, *Grill.* 5, *Nantes.* 7, *Fairytales.* 8, *No man's land.* 11, *Struts.* 13, *Iron.* 14, *Sunless.* 16, *Aboriginal.* 17, *Gorgonzola.* 20, *Carman.* 23, *Sari.* 27, *Basset.* 30, *Sutro.* 31, *Slang.* 32, *Time.* 33, *Bent.*

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She was pounding away at the harmonium literally for dear life

GRANDMA played on

by E. L. MALPASS

PEN Y GRAIG FARM was unusual in that its roster of hibernatory animals included Grandma.

Back in January, 1947, it had begun. One of the worst of winters it was, if you remember. And the rooms so cold that your feet froze to the linoleum. Damn near perished, Grandma did. And then she had an idea.

She broached the matter over supper in the icy, stone-flagged kitchen. She said quietly, with chattering teeth, "Preparing to leave you all, I am."

"Well, there is a nice way to talk," said Bron, my mam. "Outlive the lot of us, you will, if you ask me."

Grandfather tore a piece of bread from the loaf, stuffed it in his mouth, stared at Gran with his cantankerous, yellow eyes. "No good dying at this time of year unless you want to lie up in the woodshed till spring," he said. "Hard as iron, the ground is."

"Wasn't talking of dying," said Gran. "Just hibernation."

Grandfather put on his spectacles, the better to glare. Taken aback he was. "You?" he cried. "You hibernate? And what about me? Who will cook my meals and wash my clothes?"

Verging on the self-centred, that one.

But my mam said, "I will look after you, Father." She turned to Gran. "Where were you thinking of hibernating to, Mother?"

Gran told her. The old air-raid shelter was still stocked with tinned foods and paraffin heaters, blankets and rugs. Oh, but furious Grandfather was. A bit desperate, too, if the truth be

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known. " And what about your marriage vows, woman? " he cried, banging the table.

Grandma said, very composed, " Nothing about not hibernating in the wedding service that I can recall, John."

And so it began. Every year after that, on the first of December, Grandma would embrace us fondly, one by one, then descend to her shelter deep in the mountainside. And very cosy she was, too, with paraffin heaters and hot water bottles and her old rocking chair; even the harmonium and the wireless. And on April 1st she would reappear among us, and kiss everyone and say, " Had a good winter, is it? " And the long rest seemed to do her the world of good. While Grandfather grew yearly more sardonic and unpredictable, Grandma became more and more gentle and relaxed. Maybe her timid nature was escaping from more than the cold.

And then, one bitter night in January, 1963—when Pen y Graig Farm was thatched thick with snow, fern and bracken etched deep in the window glass, bedrooms cold as outhouses, outhouses cold as Antarctica—there was Gran, thinking she heard something funny above the ten o'clock news.

She switched off the set. Yes, no doubt about it. A scrabbling at the entrance to her shelter.

Wished with all her heart she was back safe in the farm kitchen, Gran did then. A lot to be said for being alone, normally. But when danger threatens—nothing like a fellow man or two

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around for restoring confidence. Gran swallowed hard. "Who is there?" she called.

No reply. The scrabbling, which had paused for a moment at her call, went on. Gran pictured an enormous mouse, with a tail six feet long, trying to get in, and was ready to swoon.

Bravely she climbed the ladder, rapped on the entrance cover. "Go away," she called.

Whatever it was went away.

Outside was silence. But unnerved, Gran was. Dare she open the cover and run for it through the darkness? The kitchen of Pen y Graig Farm had become the thing she longed for most on earth. And the thought of spending the night alone in her shelter was unbearable.

Since Gran was so timid she had had to do many things in her life that called for tremendous courage. But now she did the bravest. She opened the cover and peered out.

The stars burnt cold as ice. The red curtains of Pen y Graig glowed warm and friendly. Silent and deserted, the frozen world was.

Carefully Gran edged her way out. Impossible, it seemed, that she should be allowed to pull herself clear and cover the hundred yards to the farm without being attacked by whatever it was. Pounded away her old heart did. Out came her head, her body, her black button boots. She straightened up, and set off panting over the treacherous snow.

Halfway, now. She could see the kitchen door, gateway to warmth and safety. And then—a grunting, shambling creature was coming towards her. She saw a hairy face, a shaggy body, hands hanging close to the earth.

Screamed, did Gran. Understandably. Then, with a swerve that would have brought roars of approval at Cardiff Arms Park, she evaded the creature and ten seconds later was pounding on the kitchen door and shouting, "Let me in."

Grandfather opened the door. Looked at Gran quizzical, he did. "Got insomnia, good girl?" he asked.

Gran almost fell into the kitchen, slammed the door behind her. "A man out there, ten feet high and not a stitch on," she gasped.

"Well, there is shameful," said Grandfather. "Be catching his death, too, this weather."

"Turned her brain it has, and small wonder, cooped up there all on her own," Mam said. "Off to bed, now, Gran, in a civilised manner, and a glass of hot milk will put you right in no time."

Grandfather shook his head doubtfully.

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" Tempting providence, if you ask me," he muttered.

" What is, John? " Very anxious, Grandma looked.

" Coming out of your nice warm burrow before April. Double pneumonia just around the corner, if you ask me."

Wrung her hands, did Grandma. But before she could decide which fate she would prefer to face, there came a whimpering at the back door. Oh, heartrending, it was. Human, almost.

Almost. But not quite.

It was quiet in the kitchen. The lamp hissed, and the fire muttered to itself. But the living creatures were as still as the little gentlemen on the willow-pattern plates on the dresser.

My da was the first to move. A quiet man, my da, never spoke if he needn't. But kind and gentle both to man and beast. Now he crossed to the door.

Put her hand to her throat, Mam did. " What are you doing, Gareth? "

My da opened the door. The creature came in, blinking in the lamplight. Then it saw the fire, and made a beeline. No whimpering, now.

A cruel winter that was, I am telling you, even for Yetis.

" Better get him some food," said my da.

" Food? " Blazing, Mam was. " Be putting out a notice, is it, *Bed and Breakfast. Yetis Welcome.*"

" Get him some food," repeated my da.

No one ever disobeyed my da. Mam brought in the remains of Sunday's chicken. Ate it in no time, that Abominab'e Snowman did. Bones and all. Even made a start on the dish, till Mam snatched it from him.

One thing asking a Yeti in for the evening. Another getting rid of him. When bedtime came he was still sitting there, enjoying the fire.

Mam said, " Well, Gareth, your little problem, isn't he? What are you going to do? "

" Let him sleep by the embers," said my da.

" Oh, no." Adamant, Mam was. " Oh, no. Takes me all my strength to face five o'clock of a winter's morning as it is, without finding that in my kitchen."

" Stick him in the barn," Grandfather called from halfway upstairs. Took more than a Yeti to upset Grandfather's routine.

A sensible suggestion, nevertheless. " Come on, boyo," my father said, friendly, laying a hand on the Yeti's shoulder.

The Yeti growled and snapped, very vicious.

Gran went back to her shelter, shot the bolts behind her, and

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swallowed a couple of aspirins. A bit unfair, she thought it, having her hibernation disturbed in this way.

But back in the kitchen Da was facing a crisis. Mam saying that if that creature wasn't out of her kitchen in two ticks she would know the reason why. And Da wondering how you shifted a ten foot Yeti who didn't want to be shifted.

Then he had an idea. Went into the larder. Found a leg of lamb and held it under the Yeti's nose. Grabbed at it, the Yeti did. But Father was too fast. Ran outside, clasping the meat, closely followed by a slavering Yeti. Flung the meat far into the snow. Came back, slammed, locked, and bolted the door.

"Well, there is fine," said Mam. "Giving good food to a heathen creature like him."

"Got rid of him, didn't I?" said Da. "What you wanted, isn't it?" Can't please some people, can you, however hard you try.

"Back he will be, for sure," said Mam.

But no. No more whimpering at the door. Outside, only the frost crushing the land in its grip, and far away the barking of Dai Hughes' dogs; and the Abominable Snowman bearing his food away into the hills.

Nos da, Yeti bach. Nos da.

Pleasant and relaxed the atmosphere was in Dinas Police Station, with Sergeant Prosser talking as affable as you please to Constable Pugh and Newshawk Howells, who had just dropped in for a chat.

Then the door was flung open. Grandfather marched in.

Looked at him wary, did Sergeant Prosser. Knew from bitter experience that a visit from Grandfather meant trouble. But even he could not have foreseen quite how much.

Slammed his stick down on the counter, did Grandfather. "Had any experience of Abominable Snowmen, Sergeant Prosser?"

Left that one alone, the Sergeant did. "What is the trouble, sir?"

"Trouble? Two of my sheep savaged by a damn Yeti."

Pricked up his ears, did Newshawk Howells. The Sergeant said, "What leads you to think it was a Snowman, sir?"

"Two nights ago my fool of a son had him in the kitchen feeding him chicken."

"And now he's savaged your sheep," said Sergeant Prosser, thoughtful, feeling his way. He had often said, very jocular, that anything could happen in Dinas Police Station. Realised now that he had spoken truer than he thought. Didn't know

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whether to ring up Scotland Yard, Cardiff Zoo, or a psychiatrist. But meanwhile Newshawk had edged up closer to Grandfather. Watching the old man like a ferret, he was.

"What did he look like?" he asked.

"Like a damn great gorilla."

"Maybe it *was* a gorilla," suggested Newshawk.

"What the devil would a gorilla be doing in the Welsh hills in January? Talk sense, man."

A good question. So good that Newshawk didn't answer it. Instead he muttered something about ringing up his Editor, and disappeared.

Grandfather turned back to Sergeant Prosser. "Well?" he barked.

"We will keep a look-out, sir," said the Sergeant wearily . . .

Spread like wildfire the news did, after that. One day it was on the back page of the *Dinas Advertiser*. The next it was front page news in every capital. "YETI SEEN IN WALES?" Reporters came to Pen y Graig like pilgrims to Mecca.

Soon had enough of that caper, Grandfather had. Took to receiving them with his shotgun across his knee. Found that if he stroked the butt thoughtful the more nervous reporters did not stay as long as they might otherwise have done.

However, the climate began to change. It was borne in on Grandfather that there was money in Yetis. And the crisis came when a Mr. Evans, who owned a circus, came and offered Grandfather one thousand pounds for his tame Yeti.

"But I have not got a Yeti," Grandfather cried in anguish. "Drove him out, my fool of a son did, just when he was getting to know us."

Oh, terrible it was for the old man, being offered a fortune for something my father had deliberately got rid of. Found himself almost praying for another of his sheep to get savaged. But no. That old Yeti seemed to have disappeared from the face of the earth. Heartbreaking, it was. Prowled about the snowy fields, Grandfather did, searching for clues—a footprint, a tuft of hair in a hedge, a gnawed bone—but nothing to be seen.

And then he met his neighbour, Dai Hughes.

"Lost something?" asked Dai.

"No," said Grandfather.

"Been a bad winter," said Dai.

"Yes," said Grandfather.

"Be glad to be out of farming. A thankless job, these days."

"You giving it up, then?" Looking at him keenly, Grandfather was now.

"Could be," said Dai, very tantalising.

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"Going to live on air, is it?"

"No," said Dai. "Got what you might call a nest egg tucked away."

"Have you, now?" said Grandfather. He walked home, very thoughtful.

At dusk he and Father set off, carrying a leg of lamb. Over the snowy fields they went. They crept up to Dai's farm. In one of the outhouses they heard heavy breathing . . .

On the return journey my da led the field, still carrying the bait. The Yeti was a close second; Grandfather third, panting, swearing, and floundering; and very far behind Dai Hughes in a jeep, grimly clutching a shotgun.

Very partial to leg of lamb, those old Yetis . . .

They reached Pen y Graig. They looked back. Between the white sky and the white earth a yellow brightness flickered and wavered. Dai Hughes' headlights!

"Not a moment to lose," said Grandfather. He plunged into the kitchen where, an hour ago, he had left Evans the Circus. "Here you are, boy," he cried. "Got your cheque-book ready?" Then he looked round helplessly. No Evans.

"Couldn't wait," explained Mam. "Coming back after the second performance."

Well, there was a situation. Ten feet of Yeti to conceal for an hour, and Dai Hughes already coming over the brow of the hill. Looked wildly round, did Grandfather.

"Quick. An outhouse," cried Da.

"First place he'll look, you fool," said Grandfather.

Only one thing for it. Da and Grandfather looked at one another very ruminative. Then, as one man, they moved towards Gran's shelter . . . .

Playing the harmonium, Gran was, when a leg of lamb plumped into the shelter, closely followed by an Abominable Snowman, and the sound of the entrance being slammed shut.

Well, there was a situation for a nervous old lady. Damn near killed her, it did. There she stood, pressing herself against the wall, watching with eyes big with horror while the Snowman finished his supper. The only possible comfort she had was that so far the creature hadn't looked at her once.

But now the moment of crisis was approaching. The leg of lamb had almost disappeared. What, supper done, would the monster turn his attention to next?

There was only one possible answer: Gran. The old lady found herself being regarded thoughtfully by a pair of small, bloodshot eyes. Slowly the Yeti heaved himself to his feet and began to shamble towards her.

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Gave herself up for lost, did Gran. The room was growing dark, she was going to faint, the monster was almost upon her. Then into her fading consciousness floated a memory of childhood, a line of poetry, *music hath charms to soothe a savage breast.* Without knowing what she was doing she groped her way to the harmonium, slid on to the seat, got the thing under way.

Very relieved, Grandfather was, when, Dai Hughes having retired baffled, he and Evans entered the shelter. Niggling a bit his conscience had been, see. Telling him it might have been dangerous to inflict an Abominable Snowman on Gran without a word of warning. But no harm had been done, apparently.

He was greeted by the stirring notes of *Men of Harlech.* And there was Gran, playing the harmonium literally for dear life, while the Yeti squatted in a corner, overcome by the unaccustomed effort of musical appreciation.

Grasped the whole situation in a moment, Grandfather did. Everything was playing into his hand, now. "Keep on, lass," he cried. "Holding the creature spellbound you are." So Gran pedalled and pounded away while Evans got Yeti bach into a net and wrote out a cheque for a thousand pounds.

And then she collapsed, weeping hysterically, in her husband's arms. Touch and go it had been, and no mistake. Only saved because she happened to play the harmonium.

A lot to be said for a musical education. Never know when it will come in handy, do you now?

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"I'll give him, 'Pussycat, pussycat, where have you gone?'"

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the beckoning beeches

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BY ELIZABETH LEMARCHAND

Argosy's new discovery

RICHARD DREW was enjoying his retirement. He had read none of the current spate of books giving advice on readjustment, as he had known for many years exactly what he wanted to do when the time came.

His well-ordered bachelor existence as an accountant had been reasonably prosperous, and it had strengthened a natural inclination for rational values and freedom from disturbance of any kind. He often remarked that he liked to know exactly where he stood, and to see his way ahead. He was both kindly and usually unselfish, in spite of a certain lack of imagination and humour.

For his sister Janet, a year younger than himself, he had genuine if rather inarticulate affection. Formerly a biology mistress at a girls' high school, she had timed her own retirement to coincide with his, and now ran their joint home. Their interests overlapped to some extent and the arrangement worked well.

At the moment when this story begins brother and sister were sitting over a leisurely breakfast, and reading their morning mail. Richard accepted his second cup of coffee and passed over a typewritten letter.

"What do you make of this, Jan?"

"Quite a good proposition from your point of view," she said a few moments later. "How did he get on to you?"

"I think it must be the man who came up after your lecture at Clapperton, and talked so much about the slides. Do you remember?"

"Yes, I do. I expect it is. I must say I can't believe there would be an enormous demand for a Dartmoor engagement diary, interleaved with photographs, but I suppose that's his affair. I take it he owns this printing and publishing business?"

"Apparently. I shall check up on it, of course. If everything's satisfactory I think I'll take it on. It would help me to get to know Dartmoor. Only a small proportion of the photographs need be of the hackneyed places. It will take time, of course, to get seasonal variety, but I see that he's thinking of publication two years ahead."

Photography was one of Richard's long-standing interests. When he and Janet had bought a bungalow on the outskirts of a small Devonshire town, they had yet to discover how an active rural community channels the ability and energy of newcomers

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to the general advantage. Janet was a water-colourist of some ability as well as a biologist. She was soon lecturing to a variety of audiences, and conducting both a sketching club and field club rambles of naturalist interest. Richard's photography supplied the invaluable visual aids for her lectures.

He himself was rapidly drawn in to the activities of the West Wessex Camera Club, and his financial experience led him inevitably to the treasurership of various local organisations. At times both brother and sister were irritated by their lack of leisure. They were unaware that the main secret of their successful retirement lay in their busy round of activities. Richard, in particular, needed a sense of purpose for contentment. The project of the Dartmoor engagement diary exactly met this requirement. Although a genuine country lover, getting to know the moor merely for its own sake would not have occurred to him as a serious proposition.

A few weeks later the negotiations with the publishing firm were brought to a satisfactory conclusion, and Richard drew up a careful scheme for the fifty-two photographs which would be needed. A spell of perfect early spring weather decided him to make a start on the work. He set off on a morning of extreme delicacy of colouring, with a sense of pleasurable anticipation. In the back of the car were two cameras, for black-and-white and colour work respectively, and a sandwich lunch. As he drove out of the garage he waved to Janet who was gardening energetically, and turned the car's nose westward.

Half an hour later he parked carefully, just off the road, and set off on foot, a spare, purposeful figure in well-worn tweeds, hatless, and wearing boots suited to rough going in the bogs. Subject matter for spring photography was abundant that morning: silver birches with exquisite tones in bark and bare branches, pussy willow overhanging tumbling streams, moor ponies of attractive winter shagginess conveniently grouped near impressive rocks.

Eventually, well satisfied with his morning's takings, he returned to his base. Apart from the occasional flash past of a solitary car or tradesman's van, he had the world to himself, and sat on after his lunch, enjoying the pale sunshine. He smoked a cigarette and considered other subjects for further expeditions. Finally, glancing at his watch, he took an ordnance map from the dashboard, and with his customary method planned a homeward route by way of minor roads unknown to him, ticking each one on the map.

It was while cautiously descending the alarming gradient of one of these that he came across a narrow, single-span bridge over

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the Marlbrook, its grey granite attractively mirrored in a clear pool on the downstream side. He drew up close into the hedge and got out, and after a reconnaissance took a couple of photographs.

On regaining the road he was struck by the beauty of a line of magnificent beech trees on the far side of the little river. The road, having crossed the bridge, bore away uphill to the right between dry stone walls. The pure straight columns of the silver-grey beech trunks formed a majestic colonnade, curving gently and rising slowly towards a small tor crowned with immense granite blocks. Overhead their leafless branches formed an intricate and delicate interlacing against the soft February sky. The prevailing wind had bent the trees a little towards the tor.

The effect, thought Richard, with an uncharacteristic flight of fancy, was really rather like a line of dancers, bowing slightly with right foot extended. Or was it the right arm extended, as if to gather something up? He found them extraordinarily, in fact disturbingly, attractive. His purposeful conscious mind came to the rescue, rationalising the attraction into recognition of a good potential photograph. As he debated, a sudden gust of wind set the whole line of trees dancing up towards the tor with an enchanting gaiety. The invitation was irresistible. Richard climbed the wall and set out for the tor himself.

The wind seemed to be making a tremendous noise in the bare branches overhead. It must be blowing up for rain, he thought, in spite of the good forecast. The afternoon sunlight came shafting across his path through the silvery colonnade. It was immensely exhilarating. For a wild moment he felt an absurd desire to run, to be one with the buoyant, tossing chain of dancers. Then, slightly ashamed and sobered by this extravagance, he remembered his purpose, and stepping clear of the trees took two studies of the tor with interesting shadow effects. The wind seemed to have died down as suddenly as it had arisen. Back at the bridge he photographed the trees on colour film, the tor beyond balanced by the pleasing irregularities of the wall in the foreground.

As the car climbed steeply up the road beyond the bridge it came to a fork, and Richard stopped to refresh his memory by a glance at the map. Conscious of being watched, he looked up sharply to see an elderly, grizzled hedger, billhook in hand, surveying him through a gap in the hedge.

"'Er b'ain't wun o' they arteerial roads, be 'er, zur?"

"That it isn't," agreed Richard, "but it'll take me out on the Exeter road all right, won't it?"

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" Aye, 'twill. Matterer mile an' 'alf."

Richard held out his cigarette case, and flicked his lighter for them both. They exchanged routine comments on the weather, and smoked in companionable silence for a few moments.

" Well, I must be off." With his hand on the gear lever he paused at a sudden thought. " By the way, can you tell me the name of the tor down there? By those beeches? It's unnamed on the map."

An instantaneous and quite indefinable change of expression passed over the man's weatherbeaten and homely face. Richard stared at him in astonishment.

With a suggestion of glancing about him, the hedger leaned towards the car window and mouthed, " Iss. That oi can. But us doan't talk of 'e."

He turned and was gone, the cracking of twigs underfoot marking his passage.

Richard's sudden sensation of chilling of the spine was quickly displaced by the embarrassment which any odd or unpredictable behaviour in others invariably produced in him. He shot into gear and down the lane at a speed much in excess of his normally cautious rate of progress on unknown minor roads. Indignation came to the rescue of his self-esteem . . . Turning on his heel like that after he'd been polite enough to stop and talk to the old fool, and give him a smoke . . .

Calming down as he joined the main road with its intermittent stream of traffic, Richard wondered why the subject of the tor was taboo locally. Hardly because of superstition, in this nuclear age, surely? On the land of some unpopular farmer, perhaps? Gradually his equanimity returned, but he knew that he would not mention the incident to Janet. He had felt a bit of a fool with the man walking off like that.

One night three weeks later he dreamed about the beeches. They seemed to be pressing ever onwards and upwards towards the tor with a dynamic energy, not dancing up in lighthearted merriment as when he had seen them before. Their extended arms tried to gather him in and take him too. He hesitated, and was lost. They were gone, and he was looking forlornly through an empty gap in the hedge . . .

He woke to the sound of voices, a door shutting and a car moving off. His bedroom door opened to reveal Janet in her dressing-gown.

" What on earth has made us both oversleep like this? " she said. " That was the post. Your roll of colour film has come, among other things."

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"Funny," he said, still not fully awake. "I was dreaming about one of the photographs."

"We'd better hurry. We're due at the Wainmans' for lunch and tea, you know."

Janet shut the door briskly, and a moment later he heard her bath-water running.

"So we are," he reflected. "Tiresome: there will be no chance of running through the slides until after supper. It's a good two hours' drive. Still, I do like the Wainmans, and I want some tips about the rockery."

As he had expected, it was after seven o'clock when they arrived home again. It had been an enjoyable day, and the open-handed Wainmans had given them some good stuff for the garden.

Janet quickly improvised supper, and they relaxed over it. It was nearly ten before Richard tried out the colour slides that had arrived that morning. He was alone. Janet was tired and had said that she was going to bed and would see anything of special interest later.

He plugged in the projector and settled himself comfortably beside it, his notebook on the invalid's table which slipped over his knees and which he found so useful for the purpose. As each slide appeared on the screen he studied it critically, and then, switching on a table-lamp, read the notes he had made at the time of taking the photograph. At intervals he added a further note on the success or failure of the techniques employed.

The great majority of the slides were, as usual, very good indeed. He lit a cigarette and savoured his leisurely enjoyment. At last he came to the photographs taken on his first expedition in connection with the Dartmoor diary. As he pressed the switch a confused memory of the morning's dream and a sudden upsurge of resentment towards the hedger flashed through his mind. The next moment brought him high gratification, and, almost simultaneously, incredulity: the beech trees were in full leaf.

Richard sat very still, staring at the screen and unable to accept the evidence of his eyes. It was a most beautiful picture. The calculated balance of tor and wall was perfect, the bold linear pattern of sun-illuminated silver trunks and their straight shadows most pleasing. But, unbelievably and impossibly, the bare branches of February which he had photographed were clothed in the diaphanous, vivid green of young beech foliage in early summer. He found himself wondering if he were dreaming. After all, he had dreamed about the trees that very morning. But this idea had to be relinquished. He knew he was awake, sitting in his study, dealing with tangible material objects.

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He put out his left hand and touched the slightly rough, warm surface of the projector, and then grasped the hard coil of its flex. Yes, he was incontrovertibly awake.

In some extraordinary way, somebody else's slide taken at this identical spot in the summer must have been inadvertently substituted during the processing. He hastily projected the four remaining slides. All were unquestionably his own, and none was in any way abnormal. He switched on the lamp and looked at the numbers on the little cardboard frames of the slides. That of the trees bore its correct number in the sequence . . . It must be an accidental substitution, of course, but one that was almost beyond the bounds of possibility.

Richard could not rid himself of the sense of discomfort which the apparently inexplicable happening had aroused in him. In an attempt to dispel it, he projected again and assessed the four slides which had so far received only cursory attention. As he put away the projector a sudden constructive thought came to him: he would return to the place at the first possible opportunity and take a second photograph. It would be perfectly normal and would establish once and for all the obvious fact that in some extraordinary way they had sent him somebody else's almost identical slide.

Richard resisted the temptation to rush off the very next day, but waited for weather conditions as similar as he could reasonably hope for. When, at last, the opportunity came he was careful to arrive at the bridge at an hour which, he calculated, would see the sun at the same altitude as before. He approached by the same route. He took the same camera and a film of identical type. Standing on the bridge he looked critically at the beeches.

A month had elapsed and there were clear signs of the imminence of spring. The upcurving branches were swelling with the rising sap, and tipped with as yet unopened buds, but of young green leaves there was no sign at all. The air was very still. The trees were motionless and the silence almost audible. With great care Richard identified his former viewpoint, and checking aperture, speed, distance, and filter, took six successive photographs. The sooner the roll is finished the better, he thought to himself.

Climbing the wall once more he began to walk slowly and deliberately towards the tor. Suddenly the sensation of being watched which he had experienced when he met the hedger made him stop short and look about him. He forced himself to look up straight into the unrevealing branches and to walk on. He

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became aware that his lips were framing words, and tried to catch them. *What* were they whispering? "Every bud an eye. Every bud an eye." The preposterous phrase seemed to swell and fill the air with deep, vibrating organ notes.

I can't be well, he thought desperately, and clawing the air with his arms he pushed through the trees and out on to the open moor. Immediately all was tranquillity and normality. Breathing rather quickly he sat down on a rock to rest, and his confidence began to flow back into him. I'll go round the end of the trees, he decided, and take the tor from there.

A minute later he was standing in front of the little tor and looking up at the huge blocks of granite on its summit. He thought that he had never seen such massive jointing: there was none of the shattering which produced the variegated and fantastic forms of so many tors. The rock-pile was like a huge, crude throne, with a tiny central seat dwarfed by enormous clumsy pillars out of all proportion to its size. He photographed it with his usual meticulous care. Shortly afterwards he reversed the car and returned by the route on which he had come. He wanted to avoid the embarrassment of a possible meeting with the hedger.

There followed a period of waiting for the return of the colour film from processing. Richard, rather fully occupied with previous commitments, found himself becoming increasingly confident about the outcome of his experiment.

"A photograph taken in February," he argued to himself, "cannot possibly show beech trees in full leaf. Therefore the slide in the locked drawer in my desk cannot be mine, and the second slide will confirm this. There is no question of anything fantastic or inexplicable . . ."

A favourite technique employed by totalitarian states desirous to break the resistance of their prisoners is to raise their hopes of release or better treatment, only to dash them again. In the ensuing despair and anguish the sought-for admissions are more readily made. Richard Drew, contemplating on his screen an exact replica of his first photograph of the beeches, felt the reassurance he had been building up being swept away as if by an avalanche. Almost mechanically he projected the next slide, showing the tor itself. In front of the massive rocks lay sprawled the dead body of a girl.

Leaning forward and breathing hard he drank in every detail of the preposterous intruder. She was deplorably dressed by any canon of taste known to him in mustard-coloured jeans and a frilly white blouse heavily stained with blood. Green eye-shadow and magenta lipstick, both lavishly applied, gave her

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full sallow face a macabre and clownish look. Lanky dark hair tumbled over her shoulders in the untidy fashion of the day. Richard knew that he had never seen her before. Desperately he switched the projector off, and then on again: the incredible fact remained unaltered.

He realised that he was trembling violently. In a moment of illumination he saw his past life, hedged in by carefully cultivated securities, as a pinpoint in a vastness of immense, unrealised realities.

"The outside has come in," he heard his dry lips saying. But the impact of the moment lessened, and even now a part of him was incredulous. Janet's step sounded in the hall and on an impulse he called out to her, quickly rearranging his slides as he did so.

"There are one or two quite decent ones in this lot," he said. "Just have a look at those close-ups of leat flora that you wanted."

Her presence behind him and her hand on the back of his chair was comforting. As she made her comments he braced himself for the experiment.

"What do you think of this one?"

He pressed the control switch and as the crucial scene appeared on the screen he awaited the exclamation that did not come.

"Good of a rather unusually massive rock formation," Janet said doubtfully, "but not particularly attractive. What tor is it?"

"It hasn't got a name," he said untruthfully. "It's near that granite bridge over the upper Marlbrook that I took for the Dartmoor diary. No, it's not beautiful. I just tried it for the unusual formation."

After she had gone Richard sat a long time at his desk, his head in his hands. An endless procession of images passed through his brain: the hedger, leaning forward and mouthing at him, a network of bare branches overhead, the desolation of his dream as the dancing cavalcade vanished, leaving him alone, the grotesquely-clothed sprawling body. Groping about for some course of action he decided to revisit the place the next day. If the problem had a solution, it must surely lie there.

As he drove down the steep hill on the following afternoon it was something of an irritating anticlimax to see another car parked by the bridge, and a picnic party in progress on the bank of the stream. He manœuvred past the car with some difficulty, and parked farther on. Feeling rather at a loss he strolled a short distance up the hill, camera in hand, reluctant to go up to the tor until the picnickers had moved on.

From a distance he saw that they were apparently beginning

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to collect their belongings. He turned and started to walk back.

As he approached the bridge the dead girl of the slide stepped up from the stream. He stood frozen in his tracks while she came towards him with a selfconscious swing of her hips.

" 'Snice here, isn't it? " she said hopefully.

" Er— very nice," he said tonelessly, and made as if to pass on.

" You're in a hurry, aren't you? " She gave him a frankly provocative glance. " Little me is dying to climb that old tor if anybody just gave me a leg up, see? "

" Don't go up there." He spoke so sharply and with such authority that the pseudo-sophistication fell from her like a cloak, and she stared at him with the eyes of a frightened child.

" There are dozens of adders under those trees," he said, grasping at the first idea that came into his head. " You might easily get bitten at this time of year."

" Oo," she shrilled, " I'm real scared of snakes, I am reely. Thanks a lot! I'm off! " She turned and ran back to the car in which a middle-aged couple, presumably her parents, were already seated. He could hear her shrill, voluble account of the peril she had so narrowly escaped. The engine started up and the car came slowly towards him, the man at the wheel calling out, " Much obliged, I'm sure," as he passed.

Richard watched it crawl slowly up the steep hill and disappear. Then he turned and stood looking along the line of beeches to the tor, a mounting sense of triumph possessing him.

Suddenly the wind was roaring overhead and the dance was on again, the trees beckoning, curvetting, tripping, hurrying eternally onwards and upwards, their upcurved arms feeling for him to sweep him into the procession.

" I'm coming! " he shouted. He cleared the wall and started to run with them, flinging up his arms in exultation. Arriving at the foot of the tor he swung round in a comprehensive gesture of defiance.

" You bloody murderers, I've fixed you! You haven't got her, do you hear me? "

Then the wind dropped with the same abruptness as it had on his first visit. He felt flat and utterly exhausted, and dropped on to the ground to rest.

I oughtn't to dash about like that at my age, he thought. It's risky. I'll stay here quietly for a bit and then go straight home.

After a time he got to his feet and walked slowly back to his car, weary in body and too mentally exhausted to think very coherently. Realising his state of mind, he drove slowly and carefully, and on joining the main road let most of the traffic overtake him. After a few miles, however, he caught up a car

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which had recently passed him. There seemed to be a traffic jam. A policeman appeared from the queue and began to beckon the cars forward.

An accident, I suppose, thought Richard lethargically. Now he could see two cars in crumpled, head-on collision, projecting half across the road, with more police signalling the traffic past them. As he came on he saw the ambulance men. They were lifting a limp body in mustard-coloured jeans and a bloodstained white blouse on to a stretcher. He must have slowed down involuntarily, for he realised that a policeman was shouting at him angrily . . .

Heads I win, tails you lose . . . heads I win, tails you lose . . . the rhythm of the engine incorporated the rhythm of the phrase. If I had let her go on she would have fallen from the top . . . Heads you win. I stopped her, and as a result the cars met just at that moment . . . Tails I lose. It wouldn't have made any difference. She was for it anyway. Why did I have to come in on it? It means nothing to me . . . It doesn't make sense . . . Richard's thoughts trailed away through sheer inanition, and it was with surprise that he found himself driving into the garage. In an attempt to appear normal to Janet he dallied a little, doing some unnecessary small jobs. At last he went into the bungalow. Relieved to find it empty he got himself a stiff whisky and soda, and took it to his study.

Later—he had no idea how much later—he heard Janet's latchkey in the lock.

"Are you in, Richard?" she called.

"Yes. Here."

Janet came in and stopped with an exclamation.

"Why, what's wrong with you? You look absolutely green and you're shivering. Have you got a chill?"

"I don't feel too good," he said thankfully. "It seemed to come on while I was driving home."

"Well, you had better go to bed at once. I'll come and take your temperature and ring Dr. Masterman this evening if it's up much."

Richard gratefully submitted to her competence, and although his temperature was sub-normal agreed without protest to stay in bed with the relaxing comfort of hot bottles. The familiar four walls of his small bedroom seemed a haven of refuge, and life within them of a manageable scale after the huge fantasies of the afternoon.

He must have dropped off to sleep at an early hour for when he woke, greatly refreshed, it was just after two o'clock. He felt much calmer than he had done for some time. The thought

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came into his mind that the girl's death might have liberated him in some way from the whole unaccountable, terrifying business. It would be easy to find out. He had only got to project again the slides of the beeches and the tor. Janet was a sound sleeper. Finally he decided to risk her wrath should she wake and find him out of bed.

Putting on dressing-gown and slippers he crept noiselessly out of his bedroom and along the passage to his study. The door was ajar. Entering the room without a sound he closed the door very quietly.

It was a matter of a moment to switch on the electric light and fire and to wheel the projector into position. Unlocking a drawer he took out the box of eight slides, seven of which were neatly labelled, *Beeches from bridge over upper Marlbrook.* The eighth slide bore the single word *Tor*, a space being left for the insertion of the distinguishing first name at some future date.

From the moment that the viewing began Richard found himself transported into a world of such beauty and delight that his immediate purpose was instantly forgotten. Sometimes he was in the ecstatic moment when spring's promise is first fulfilled at the threshold of summer, and the young green of the beeches seemed to burn against forget-me-not skies and clouds whiter than wool. Then the great silver columns of their trunks formed a temple filled with the Pentecostal descent of ten thousand tongues of fire. A hundred winters came and went, with bare branches exquisitely articulated against grey skies, and the earth a carpet of smouldering fire.

Once, incredibly, the columns rose from snow fluted with cobalt shadows, while tiny scattered copper-red fires still gleamed overhead. And ever and again came the dance, onwards and upwards, lilting and irresistible. This time he did not hesitate. He was swept up and on, right up to the tor itself, and from the throne gazed out in rapture at the beauty yet to be . . .

Janet found him at dawn, the early morning light dimming the picture on the screen. She had often seen a similar look of delighted enlightenment on the faces of her pupils. For a moment she thought he was asleep, and dreaming happily.

A few weeks later George Morley, the President of the West Wessex Camera Club, wrote to Janet suggesting an exhibition of Richard's photographs. Although she knew him less well than her brother had done, Janet had always liked this quiet elderly man, with his enthusiasm for his hobby and encyclopedic knowledge of the neighbourhood. She replied warmly, and asked him to come over and make a selection. They spent a long

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afternoon together going through the orderly well-documented collection.

"There are just these left," she said finally, "the slides Richard was looking at when he died. One is a tor—I don't know its name. It seemed to interest him in some way. I remember his asking me to look at it once. All the others are labelled, *Beeches from upper Marlbrook bridge.*"

George Morley paused in the act of shutting a box and looked up sharply. "I beg your pardon," he said, "*what* are they labelled?"

Surprised by his tone Janet repeated her statement.

"Could we run through them?"

"Of course. I'll just draw the curtains."

The first slide showed a foreground of dry stone wall and a gentle slope of rough grass, heather, and gorse leading up to a small tor, crowned with massive blocks of granite. It was followed by six replicas of itself.

"But where are the beeches?" Janet asked in bewilderment. "Richard was so careful: he never made muddles or labelled things wrongly."

George Morley was silent for a moment.

"They were cut down in 1914, Janet," he said.

Taking her by the arm he led her to a chair in the open window, drawing back the curtains again. The soft air and fragrance of the early summer evening filled the room.

"I don't understand, George." Janet suddenly felt very tired and at the brink of tears. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Take it easy, my dear," he said, "and I'll tell you all I can. My father was President of the Rural Wessex Preservation Society at the time. There was a tremendous outcry—they were magnificent trees—but Dartmoor was much more remote in those days, and they were down before anyone could even try to stop it. They were on an estate which was broken up in the twenties. Its owner brought in a Plymouth firm to do the job: his own men refused. There was a good deal of superstition locally about the trees: stories that they danced up to the tor at sunrise, and that sort of thing. And there was a custom of running underneath them when a wind was blowing, and then jumping into a kind of seat on the tor from which you were supposed to see into the future."

George Morley paused. Janet, listening intently, made him a sign to go on.

"Well, apparently there was a pretty gay party at the Manor on midsummer night in 1914, and the lively young daughter of the house suggested that they all went down to the beeches and

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tried their luck at clairvoyance, so to speak. There was a lot of fooling about, but when her turn came she collapsed, had to be carried home, and subsequently had a bad nervous breakdown. She saw—or thought she saw—the bodies of her two brothers in khaki uniforms lying at the foot of the tor. The father, who was pretty badly shaken himself, had the trees cut down on the grounds of putting a stop to the superstition."

"And the brothers?"

"Yes. Both killed on the Marne that September."

"I simply don't understand," said Janet, after a long pause, "but looking back over this spring I'm certain that Richard had some kind of unusual experience in connection with the place, especially on that last afternoon of his life."

"There's a local name for that tor," said George Morley reflectively. "It isn't on the ordnance map, and the country folk are chary of using it to outsiders. They call it the Teller."

Janet looked at him.

"When I found Richard I saw that he had just understood something immensely important," she said.

© Elizabeth Lemarchand 1964

THE WOOD

There was a wood of beech trees near my home
Whose roots were twisted round the pitted rocks,
And in the branches every spring
The thrushes sang so constantly
The glens became a single chord of sound.
The sun lay all along the faces of the leaves
And on the swinging rows of scentless flowers;
The wood stretched far into the silences,
But as you leaped from rock to rock, you heard
The tiny notes of water dripping on bright stones
And orchestras of insects underground,
You saw the ferns uncurling baby fronds
And sudden islands of forget-me-nots.
And when at last you reached the circling wire
That cut in two this trembling forest world,
You plunged into a hundred seas of bluebell light
And like a crazy traveller drugged and lost
In undiscovered continents,
You sank, defeated, drenched with flowers,
Beneath the drowning tides that wandered there.

LEONARD CLARK

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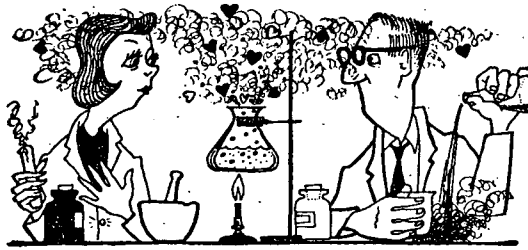

FRUSTRATIONS

He that can love unlov'd again,
Hath better store of love than brain

ROBERT AYTOUN

On his knees in the meadow-grass, the passionate youth was struck by a literary idea. Hoping to turn it to a weapon of love, he sprawled beside her. He gathered her lovely legs in his arms like a sheaf of wheat. He searched her eyes. He said: "How terrible that we shall never know what we feel about each other! The eagerness I have for you is not yours for me, nor ever can be. Your love will always be my mystery, while the expression of my reality of love for you is merely food for your vanity, not for your understanding."

He paused to enjoy this tragic gulf between them while she gazed at him in smiling contemplation.

"Just think of it!" he exclaimed. "How impossible to tell one's love! What is there for you in the loveliness of a woman's form . . . How shall I ever make you understand my excellent appreciation of you—"

She answered him decisively with peals of disgusting laughter.

ERIC DUTHIE, *Bloomsbury: the Old Crowd*

Poles Apart

Though at making of love I never was a dab,
We were soon on the best of terms,
In fact the first time I saw her in the lab
We generated n^2 therms.

Her metabolisms I shall never forget
Nor her parallaxes till I die,
But the sad thing is that, whenever we met,
The sparks they used to fly.

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Alas and alack! it was ever, ever thus;
We had perforce to part,
For she—she was a minus and I—I was a plus;
In fact we were poles apart.

J. C. SQUIRE, *The Lass o' the Lab*

Grim Prospects

"Yes, and what makes it so damned grim," said the girl, "is that Father and Mother are both about a hundred and eighty, and they've got no business to hang on to four or five thousand and dish me out a grim little handful of pence."

"Yes. That is damned grim. Still it leaves us a thousand."

"A thousand doesn't go far," pointed out the girl. "You can't get a service flat under five hundred."

"Good God, no."

"Then for God's sake, be practical. Five hundred for the flat leaves five hundred for everything else."

"That's rather a grim prospect," said the man gloomily. "And I'm damned fond of you, Slick."

"And I'm damned fond of you, Crabface."

"But still five hundred for everything else—"

"No good," she said decisively . . .

A. G. MACDONELL,
England, Their England

Deafened

Take me in your arms, Miss Moneypenny-Wilson,
Take me in your arms, Miss Bates;
Fatal are your charms, Miss Moneypenny-Wilson,
Fatal are your charms, Miss Bates;
Say you are my own, Miss Moneypenny-Wilson,
Say you are my own, Miss Bates;
You I love alone, Miss Moneypenny-Wilson,
You, and you alone, Miss Bates.

Deaf to my cries, Miss Moneypenny-Wilson,
Deaf to my sighs, Miss B.;
Deaf to my songs and the story of my wrongs,
Deaf to my minstrelsy;
Deafer than the newt to the sound of the flute,
Deafer than a stone to the sea;
Deafer than a heifer to the sighing of a zephyr
Are your deaf ears to me.

PATRICK BARRINGTON

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Morton's hold over Ada Summit was complete. It amused Morton to demonstrate his power over Ada by allowing the rest of us, her unsuccessful lovers, to take her out occasionally when he had to work evenings at his father's shoe-store or when he had what he would refer to mysteriously as "another engagement." He once gave me a nickel to take Ada to the Nickelodeon . . . where the first silent pictures were playing. Afterwards I had to deliver her back to Morton at the shoe-store. Sometimes he would allow one of us to hold Ada's hand. He would take out a gold watch with an elaborately interwoven monogram of his initials on the case, and say: "Like to hold Ada's hand? Give him your hand, Ada, and let him hold it for a minute." Demurely, a little embarrassed, but smiling, Ada would offer her hand. Morton would stand like a timekeeper, while you held Ada's hand. It was a kind of dispensed droit du seigneur, a demonstration to the world, as far as Ada was concerned, of Morton's power of total recall.

S. N. BEHRMAN, *The Worcester Account*

With A Gift Of A Watch

With me, while present, may thy lovely eyes
Be never turned upon this golden toy . . .
But when the cares that interrupt our bliss
To me not always will thy sight allow,
Then oft with kind impatience look on this,
Then every minute count—as I do now.

GEORGE, LORD LYTTELTON, *c.* 1732

"Seems funny, being married and all," said Rosie softly.

"Seems all right to me," said Fred.

"Remember them crosses you drew in the dirt in the road that day?" said Rosie.

"That I do," said Fred.

"And all them you put in the letters?" said Rosie.

"All of 'em," said Fred.

"Kisses, that's what they're supposed to stand for," said Rosie.

"So they say," said Fred.

"You haven't given me one, not since we was married," said Rosie. "Don't you like it?"

"That I do," said Fred. "Only, I don't know—"

"What?" said Rosie.

"It makes me feel all queer," said Fred, "when I kiss you. As if I wanted—"

"What?" said Rosie.

"I dunno," said Fred.

JOHN COLLIER, *Mary*

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VALLEY OF EDEN

by Brian Cleeve

THEY walked for a long time, hearing nothing but their own footsteps, the whistles of a marmot somewhere on the ridge above them, the whisper of the shallow glacier stream tumbling grey-white and sullen over its stone bed. Ahead of them rose the white curtain of the mountain.

The sun was hot, and she turned aside at last to a little bank of grass among scattered rocks. "Let's rest," she said. She sat on the grass, and he lay down a little way off and stared at the sky through half closed eyes.

I'm alone with her, he thought wonderingly. Who could imagine it? No one at home certainly. Holger Christiansen, the pastor's son, who flushed scarlet if a girl looked at him. He smiled at the sky as if he was no longer Holger, but someone else, someone free and reckless. It was as if he had known that something like this would happen when he stood out against his father and came away on this holiday, hitch-hiking south from Denmark through Germany and Switzerland.

He had met them trudging up the Julier; three Norwegians, two boys and a girl. But he had seen only the girl. As tall as her brother, wearing a boy's khaki shirt and a sailor's white cap that almost hid her hair, she could almost have been a third boy. Long brown legs, heavy boots, a rucksack, a stick.

He smiled at the sky, remembering. They had camped together that night, and for the three nights after. The girl Sigrid. Her brother Andreas. Their cousin Mauritz. Himself. They had taken him in as if he too was part of their family.

"What will they think of us running away from them like this?" he said to Sigrid.

"Are you afraid of them?" she said.

He shook his head, flushing. She had suggested it. And he had come with her as if hypnotised, as if it was a dream. Stealing away when the others were sleeping after lunch. Were they awake by now? Looking for them?

She said nothing for a long time, and then, "It must be strange to be a preacher's son."

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"Yes," he said. The old man was like an eagle in the pulpit, bald head fringed with silver, eyes so piercing that they could see eternity. "He was quite old when I was born."

"And your mother?"

"No," he said. "She was quite young."

She rolled over on to her stomach and looked at him, caught by his tone. "Was? Is she dead?"

He shook his head. "She left after I was born," he said. "I think she went to America."

"I am sorry," Sigrid murmured. She plucked a grass and chewed the end of it. The backs of her long legs were not so brown as the fronts. In the sunlight they seemed pale gold. She tilted her head, looked at him from the corners of her eyes and away again. "Have you a girl in Denmark?"

He shook his head.

"I have no boy either," she said. "Not really."

He stared at her in astonishment.

She looked at him again. Their faces were very close together. He saw that she had a small velvet mole at the corner of her mouth; he had never been so close to a girl's mouth. He found that he couldn't breathe properly, he couldn't see anything but her mouth, her lips a little apart, dark and soft. What would it be like to—? His heart was beating, thudding in his chest—he mustn't move, mustn't—but why not? What would be wrong in it? But they had trusted him, taken him along with them. She didn't know what he was like, what dreams he had, she couldn't know what men were like; she was so innocent, to ask him to come with her like this, alone, miles from her brother.

He shut his eyes, held himself rigid, and yet against his will his head moved, their lips were touching, her lips very warm and soft, his own desperate to be gentle, to remain innocent, the blood shouting in his head.

After a moment she must have drawn back a little because they were no longer kissing. He stayed still, his eyes closed, his heart thumping, choking him. What had he done? What would she do?

He opened his eyes and she was smiling at him, still very close, her mouth bare inches away from his. She tilted her head a little, closed her eyes, and as if he was dreaming he found himself kissing her again. He put up one hand to touch her hair, buried his fingers in its warm, heavy gold. Neither of them said a word. Only their bodies drew together, their arms went round one another, and he no longer thought of anything.

They lay like that for a long time, until at last, drugged with

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the heat of the sun, and the quietness, they fell asleep, her head lying on his shoulder, her hand under his shirt. And he dreamed of warmth, of his mother, of gold hair like a warm cloak surrounding him, of a warm hand against his heart. Until in his dream the hand grew cold, he was surrounded with cold, began to shiver.

He started awake, his body chilled through. The sun had moved and they were in the shadow of a rock. How long had they slept? By the look of the sun it must have been for hours.

The voices that had woken him called again, echoing up the valley: "*Holger! Sigrid!*"

He shook her awake and she sat up yawning and shivering. "The others are looking for us!" he whispered. They stared round, searching instinctively for somewhere to hide, but there was nowhere.

"Quick!" she whispered. "Up the valley."

They scrambled to their feet and ran, bending low, the bank of grass they had been lying on hiding them from Andreas and Mauritz. The valley twisted and narrowed as it climbed, and after a little while there was no longer any grass. Instead there was snow. Mere brownish patches at first. But on the high ridges above them there were drifts of snow, dazzlingly white, and ahead of them the glacier was a great folding, falling curtain of whiteness, spreading down towards them from the mountain peaks.

They ran side by side, jumping from boulder to boulder, following an almost invisible path among the stones. She pointed ahead, to where the tracks of a summer skier climbed in a faint, shadowy line up and across the glacier towards the eastern ridge.

"That track must lead over into the next valley," she panted. "We'll go over and round and get back to the camp before them." She tried to laugh, to make it sound like a game, but she avoided his eyes. And he felt only that they had to get away . . . to hide. He thought of facing Andreas, Mauritz, knowing that they could read what had happened in his eyes. The way his father always knew what he had done . . .

They reached the foot of the glacier and started climbing, scrambling up over the first broken chunks and boulders of ice, until they were on to its surface, running in the little trenches of packed, icy snow made by their unknown predecessor's tracks. They stumbled upwards, slipping, now and then breaking through the snow-crust and sinking ankle deep. Behind them voices shouted, calling to them to come back.

"They can't climb as fast as we can," Sigrid whispered.

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"They're too heavy. They'll break through all the time."

A fold of the glacier hid them from their pursuers. The trail changed direction, grew steeper. The air seemed thinner already, bit sharply as they panted, dragged it into their throats.

Above them the peaks of the mountain floated against the sky. The nearest peak was half hidden by low cloud, clouds drifting against it like smoke, gathering apparently out of nothing. The rest of the sky was still a dazzling, almost a silver blue, although the sun was no longer really warm. He sweated as he climbed, but the sweat turned cold on his skin and chilled him even while he was still sweating.

Glancing up at the sun to see how long they had before sunset, he saw a cloud drifting a bare hundred feet above their heads, its soft, swag belly bulging down towards them, its grey vapours coiling, as if it was alive. It moved very swiftly, drifting between them and the sun, reaching out, covering it, swallowing it up. Instantly it was cold. Not simply the chill cold of evenings lower down the valley by the lake, but a ferocious cold, biting into his skin under his thin shirt.

"Look!" he said, pointing, and she stopped and looked up. "We'd better keep below it," he said, "keep left."

Above them the trail of footsteps disappeared into the greyness. "Or go back," he wanted to say, but he didn't say it.

She stood still for a long moment, looking, and then started off to her left, away from the trail. This high the snow was hard, feet thick over the underlying ice, and they needed to kick footholds at every second step. Before they had gone ten yards he knew they had been mad to leave the trail and he wanted to call to her to turn back, but pride stopped him.

Out of the greyness behind them a voice echoed faintly, died away. Then nothing . . . He slipped, and fell ten yards down the slope before he could save himself.

As he climbed back, he saw that the cloud was behind them now as well as above them. Their footsteps came out of the soft grey cloud; as he watched it, it followed them, crept behind them, swallowing their steps one by one.

"Look," he said again, his voice shaking. She looked and knew better than he did what it meant.

"Hurry," she said. But it was impossible to hurry because as soon as they tried to they slipped. Twice again he slipped yards down the slope. The second time he didn't try to climb back directly, but slanted upwards to meet her line of climbing. Before he had reached it, the cloud caught them.

It had been grey before. Now it was dark. The cloud covered him, soaked him in the first moments. "Sigrid!" he

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shouted. "*Sigrid!*" She couldn't be ten yards from him. He plunged upwards, fell on to his knees, and she was there, her face silver with wet, icy water running on her throat, down into the neck of her sweater.

"We'll have to turn back!" he shouted. She looked at him uncertainly, as if she wanted to refuse. He grabbed her wrist impatiently, pulling her towards him. As he pulled her she slipped, caught at his arms to save herself, and his own feet went from under him. They were both falling, rolling and sliding, the snow pluming up from their bodies, a small avalanche of snow skidding away from beneath them, beside them, following them down. She tried to claw herself to a stop and he slid helplessly against her and they fell again, until at last a curve of the slope held them naturally, breaking the momentum of their fall; and they lay side by side, gasping for breath.

Clumps of snow fell round them, slid farther down into the greyness, vanished from sight and sound. Somewhere to the left there was a dull roar of falling, as if just below them in the grey mist there was a cliff's edge.

"I think we've been lucky," she said at last, through stiff lips. "We'd better climb back and find our trail again."

But they didn't find it. Even the scar of their fall had vanished, they couldn't be sure what line it had taken, whether they were climbing straight or slanting. They could see five, perhaps ten yards at times, and again the cloud would thicken and they could barely see each other.

They went on climbing, for an hour, two hours, the slope growing steeper and steeper, until they had to use hands and feet, Holger kicking footholds in the packed snow and helping her up each time. They were no longer thinking. They moved mechanically, because there was nothing else to do . . . Until at last the slope grew too steep to climb at all without ice axes, was no longer a slope but a cliff, a wall of ice, and they had to move sideways along its base. He lost all sense of time, of distance. Simply to move, to keep on moving, had become an end in itself.

Every few paces he stopped to look back, to make sure she was close to him. She was moving more and more slowly, her face to the ice wall, her hands against it, her feet taking a long time to lift at each new step. "Take hold of my hand," he said. She looked at him and stopped moving altogether.

"I'm so cold," she whispered. Her teeth chattered together, her whole body began to shake. Her legs shook and she swayed outwards, falling. He got to her just in time, pinned her against the cliff with his right arm.

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He looked down and saw nothing below them at all. Only the grey softness of the fog. The steep slope of snow that they were traversing disappeared into it less than a yard below their foothold. He thought of falling into that grey nothing, and felt sick, pressing his body against the ice to stop it trembling. He felt the cold of it eat into his skin, into his flesh and bone. He felt his mind slowing down, drifting away from him, looking from outside himself at his own body, at their two bodies. Cold. Drifting. It was quite pleasant to float like this above the mountainside; to think of nothing, to fade into nothing, into a darkness without feeling, without effort.

In a little while he would fade away like smoke dissolving, dissolve into the grey cloud. Under him his frozen legs shook a little, his foot slipped, and he woke to claw at the ice, shocked awake by terror . . .

He cried out, and his hand clenched on her body instinctively, to save himself, almost bringing her down with him. He got back his foothold and stood pressing her against the ice, remembering, trying to think. Sigrid. There was something that they had to do. Something important that they had to do . . .

His mind circled, drifted, tried to concentrate. And slowly, as if he was looking into a mirror after a long illness, slowly recognising in the unfamiliar features his own altered face, he realised that it was not some "they," some powerful entity given strength by its other parts, that had to do whatever needed to be done. It was himself. He alone.

"*I* have to," he whispered. "I. Holger. *I have to do it.*"

He lay against the ice trying to grasp the thought, to hold it, to consider it. He was not alone any more. There was someone else, someone needing him. He tried to smile and found that his lips didn't move, were frozen into stiffness. Frozen.

"We've got to move," he whispered to her. "Got to move." She didn't answer. She looked at him slowly, her eyes smoke-filled, not really seeing him. "Try to move," he said. He lifted his own foot, took a sideways step, drew her after him. It hurt to move and he stopped. What was the point in moving? There was nowhere to move to, no safety or warmth ten yards farther on, farther back. When he stayed still there was no pain.

We could stay here until the cloud lifts, he thought. And then: but it may be night before that. It must be almost nightfall now. He thought of looking at his watch, but it was too much effort. Just stay quiet, not moving, lying against the warmth of the ice wall. It was warmer now. He couldn't feel any cold at all. "It's warm," he wanted to tell her. Perhaps

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the sun was shining on them, they were still lying on the warm grass, dreaming.

Somewhere in his mind a voice whispered, warned him. What did they say at home when the cold came, the real cold? The wolf winter, cracking the trees with cold, catching the drunkards stumbling home from the inn, felling them between one drunken footstep and another, freezing them where they fell. He had been told that they felt warm before they died, quite warm and happy. And it was just when they felt that that they were dying. Was he dying now?

His father had wanted him to die. The time when he was ill, when his father had nursed him day and night, slept in a chair beside him, given him the medicine hour by hour through the nights. His father. Was he truly his father? Did his father believe that he was? Or was he the sailor's child, got between one voyage and another in some squalid room down by the docks? Was that what his father saw when he nursed him, when he looked at his red hair on the pillow that was nothing like his own sparse silver hair that had once been black?

If he died there would be nothing to remind his father any more of his Fru Lily who had left him for a common sailor. Where had she gone? Where was she now? Sometimes Holger had thought she would come back for him, and he had lain awake night after night expecting to hear her calling from beyond the small garden, from the sand dunes where she used to walk on summer evenings. He had left his bedroom window open all one long November night to make sure he heard her when she called him. He had been so sure she would come. That was how he had got ill.

I came here against his will, he thought slowly. Defied him. The first real defiance . . .

Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land . . . And he had not honoured him. Not ever really. Only feared him. And, in his heart, hated him. They had hated each other.

He lay pinned against the ice as if his sin of hatred, as if his father's hatred, fastened him there. He looked up at the sky and there was nothing. Not even hatred. Only the grey cloud. Nothing. Quite near him someone was crying. He wondered slowly, vaguely, who it could be. His mother? But she was far away. She couldn't be here beside him on the mountains. She wouldn't have known how to find him here. Who could be crying near to him? He looked sideways. Moving his head very slowly. It was hard to see. Someone was there. Someone.

Gradually he remembered again, remembered her. Sigrid.

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Her white cap had fallen away long ago, and her hair was white with frost. Her face was white, green white as the moon, and her eyes were shut and hidden. She was crying raspingly, shuddering with the cold.

"Don't," he tried to say. "It'll soon be finished." He drew her closer, and she turned to face him, her eyes still shut, her mouth a little open, the lower jaw shivering helplessly, trembling. She was no longer beautiful. Merely something that was dying horribly, ugly as death. In a little while she would curl up like a burnt cinder, burnt by ice instead of fire, stiff and hideous and dead.

"Don't!" he said, and tried to shake her alive, prevent her from withering, burning away to frozen ashes. Make her move. Move. He edged sideways, drew her with him. Her feet stayed where they were. She merely leaned towards him, lay against him, already stiff, her arms stiff, helpless as the thin branches of a tree split by the cold.

He held her against his body, breathed on her face. "Sigrid," he breathed on her, "stay alive, don't die, don't die." Breathing any words that came to him. Her eyelids opened a little. She seemed to smile at him, but it was his imagination. He kept his two arms round her, began to edge sideways, half backwards along the ledge of packed snow under the ice wall, dragging her after him.

Inch by inch backward along the ledge, along the face of the ice wall. If he slipped it was the end for both of them. Don't look down. Don't look outwards. Only at her frost-bright hair close to his face, at the ice wall beside them. Nothing else. Inch by inch backward, kicking his boots into the snow, listening for a second to hear if loose snow fell away into nothing, then putting a little of his weight on the back foot, a little more, then all of it. Pulling her after him. And the grey cloud clinging round them, drifting its wet cold against them, waiting for them to fall.

"Live," he whispered. "We've got to live." Inch by inch. Not knowing what was behind him. Crevasse? Cliff edge? Step back, wait, press foot into the snow, pull. Step back, wait, press firm, pull.

The blood began to come back to frozen muscles, to push knives of ice into his bones. He found he was whimpering with the pain and he opened his mouth wide and screamed defiance at the cloud. "No! No!" An echo came back, muffled, dying. Snow slipped from somewhere above them, thudded in a white rush beside their heads, vanished downwards. For a little he heard it falling and then nothing. He stopped, his

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legs shaking with exhaustion and cold. What was the point of going on? No one could go on. Perhaps she was already dead.

He put his mouth against hers, tried to feel her breathing. He could feel nothing. No warmth. No breath. He put his hand on her heart. And his hand could feel nothing. Not the roughness of her frozen shirt. Not the softness of her breast. Not any beating of her heart. Nothing. Was she already dead? He thought that her eyelids moved. Just a little, not even enough to see her eyes. But if they moved—

He'd do ten more steps. Just ten. Then stop. Lean against the ice and stop, rest there for a little. Just ten. Counting them. Eight. Nine. Lean against the ice and stop. He finished the tenth step and leaned. And almost fell. He had to reach out the full length of an arm before he could touch the cliff wall. Where had it gone? What had happened? He tried to see, screwing up his eyes, but he could see nothing. Was he blind? Snow blind? But when he turned back towards her he could see her hair, white crystals of frost, the grey background of the cloud. Ten more paces? It wasn't possible. Just one more. Just to move, not to stop. And another. Five. Seven. At ten he'd stop again. At twelve. At thirteen his legs folded under him, and he fell, bringing her down with him. They began to roll, to slide.

He was too strong, he thought. My father was too strong.

He still held her in his arms, and they seemed to fall for a long time, but in some strange way they were falling gently, not fast at all. Very gently falling. And then the falling stopped, and they were lying still, on what seemed like level snow.

For a long time he was afraid to move. Then very cautiously he felt round him. Level. Firm. He knelt up. If it was level he could crawl. They must have slid down a fairly easy slope and come to level snow. But they had fallen the wrong way. Not to his right, but to his left, where the cliff face ought to have been. He peered into the dark and there was nothing. Only the faint whiteness of the snow, fading to blue shadows a little way away. But no cloud. He looked up, and it still floated above them. A few yards above them. They had fallen down from it, out of it. They must have crossed the ridge without knowing, felt their way round the cliff edge of the mountain, over the ridge between one valley and another, and fallen.

In the darkness in front of him a point of fire burnt. And another. It was night and there were stars. Ahead of him the shadow whiteness of the snow tilted downwards, into the bluish dark of the valley.

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He knelt, dragged himself upright, lifted her. He was too numbed with cold to think, even to feel. Not even triumph. And what was there to triumph over? Except that they were still alive, still together and alive. He held her to him, looking down into the new valley. But it was too dark to see what it was like. Except that a long way ahead, beyond the valley, starlight shone on water.

To his numbed mind it seemed like a guide, like a promise. He drew her arm round his neck and began to stumble down the slope, into the dark.

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MAGIC and GLITTER

Everyone has read of the magical glitter of this place, but until you have set foot in New York it is difficult to conceive of a city so sparkling that at any moment Mr. Fred Astaire might quite reasonably come dancing his urbane way down Fifth Avenue . . .

In the downtown streets of this city, away from the slums and dingy suburbs, you are still in a world of ever-spirited astonishment. The best of the new buildings are glass eyries, gay and delicate. The stores breathe a most cultivated kind of opulence—not the seductive allure of the French shops, nor the masculine distinction of London's, but something more homely without being less sophisticated. Clouds of steam from the central heating systems periodically issue from the streets, like small urban geysers . . .

Wander up to Central Park, and you will find a row of hansom cabs, heated in the winter with little charcoal stoves, tended by elderly gentlemen in top hats, and much in demand by susceptible romantics for bumpy dalliances in the park. Potter down to the water-front, and you may stand in the shadows of the Atlantic liners . . . or watch a tall Yankee tug steam insolently beneath the girders of Brooklyn Bridge, her captain chewing his gum with splendid nonchalance on his high curved bridge.

This is a beautiful city—beautiful of silhouette, of colour, of dramatic impact . . .

JAMES MORRIS, *Cities*

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I killed Gordon McNaghten

By HENRY CECIL

YES, SIR, I once knew a man who had been charged with murder and who was sorry that they pretty well abolished the death penalty in 1957, with the Homicide Act. Not because he preferred to die, oh, dear me, no.

He was fond of life and of the good things in it. So was I. It's a good many years ago since we enjoyed some of them together. But we certainly did.

We saw a lot of each other, Jimmy and I. Had the same tastes in business and pleasure. In both, we liked it easy. Not too much work but well paid. Lots of pleasure and not too much to pay for it. They were good days. At any rate I found them so. Jimmy wasn't quite so lucky. As I said, he found himself charged with murder.

In a way it was a simple case, but it wasn't all that simple. It had been suggested in certain quarters that some of our deals weren't quite on the level. It was nonsense, of course. But Jimmy was heard to remark that, if anyone talked to the police, he wouldn't advise any insurance company to insure that man's life.

Well, Gordon McNaghten went to the police about us. And, before they had time to act on his word of mouth, Gordon McNaghten died. Suddenly and violently.

It was a bad moment for Jimmy. Apart from his statement, there were pieces of evidence which linked him with the murder, and they charged him with it.

He was tried at the Old Bailey and, at the close of the case for the prosecution, things didn't look good for him at all. But I gave him a good alibi, and they couldn't break me down.

I can't say that I told the whole truth, or even the truth at all. But it's not on my conscience. Jimmy was my friend. And friends should stick by each other, don't you think? A little matter of perjury shouldn't come between them. So Jimmy was acquitted.

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Why am I telling you all this? Am I frightened that they can charge me with perjury now? No, sir, I'm not. I shall be standing before the Great Judge long before they can start a case against me, let alone bring me to trial. And I'm not sorry. I've had a full life and a very long one. And I've had enough. The engine's running down.

And perhaps you'll be able to corroborate me when I stand my trial up there, and say that I did tell someone before I left this world. Anyway, I've told you and you can do what you like about it.

But why did Jimmy wish the death penalty hadn't been abolished? I'm coming to that. You mustn't rush me. We like to take it slowly at my age.

Well, we didn't see quite so much of each other, Jimmy and I, after the trial. Both of us thought it might be better, for a time at any rate, if we carried on separately. So we drifted apart.

I hadn't heard of him for some years when, one day, I got a shock. I picked up my morning paper. And there was an article by him. And what was it called? *I Killed Gordon McNaghten.*

I wondered what they paid him for it and I couldn't resist getting in touch with him to ask him. He told me. Then I asked if it was quite safe. "Of course it is," he said. "I've been acquitted and I can't be tried again for the same crime." And he was right about that. I asked a lawyer I knew, and he said Yes, that was right, he couldn't be charged again with the same crime.

But some of the public didn't like it and some of the Members of Parliament didn't like it. And a lot of letters were written to the papers and a lot of questions asked in Parliament. And the next I heard of Jimmy was in the paper again. They'd arrested him. Oh, no, the lawyer was quite right. They couldn't charge him with the murder. They didn't. They charged him with two alternative charges: perjury and obtaining money by false pretences.

Jimmy's counsel made a great fuss about the two charges being heard together.

"My Lord," he said, "perjury is one thing, false pretences is another. If the prosecution say that my client committed perjury at his trial for murder, let him be tried for that and let the jury give their verdict upon it. If thereafter the prosecution desire to persecute my client by charging him with obtaining money by false pretences let them do so before a different jury on a different occasion.

"In my respectful submission, my Lord, to try the accused

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on these two completely separate charges, which are nothing to do with one another, is an affront to justice."

"Well," said the judge to counsel for the prosecution, "what d'you say?"

"My Lord," replied counsel, "in the ordinary way the prosecution would not have sought to have had these two different charges heard by the same jury. But this is a very exceptional case. The accused was tried for murder and gave evidence on his own behalf denying his guilt and alleging that he was somewhere else at the time the crime was proved to have been committed. The accused was acquitted.

"Some years later he approached a daily newspaper and offered to sell to it for a not inconsiderable sum a story which he claimed to be true. In this story, secure in the knowledge that he could not be tried again for the murder, he said that he killed Gordon McNaghten and described how he did so. He said his alibi was false and described how he had fabricated it.

"Which story is true, my Lord? The one he swore to in the witness box, or the one he sold to the newspaper? Suppose, my Lord, the accused is simply tried for perjury, he could go into the witness box and calmly say that the evidence given by him on his trial for murder was true.

"If the jury accept that explanation and he is then tried for obtaining money from the newspaper proprietors by falsely pretending that he had committed the murder, he could then say that he had committed it. If the jury believed that or were in doubt as to whether it might be true, they would have to acquit him.

"It is true that he could then be charged with perjury on his trial for perjury. But he could then revert to his other story and say that it was the other story which was true."

Counsel for the prosecution paused. The judge looked thoughtful.

"In other words, as long as the accused is only tried for one of these offences at a time, he can ring the changes until eventually everyone concerned with the case dies of old age. The only solution to this problem, my Lord, is for him to be tried by one and the same jury on both charges as alternatives and that jury can make up its mind on the whole of the evidence as to what the truth of the matter is.

"My learned friend talks of an affront to justice. In my submission, the affront comes from the accused and not from the prosecution. Having sworn he did not commit the murder, he snaps his fingers in the face of the public and arrogantly proclaims that he did commit it. In my submission justice is

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Born and reared in Georgia, CARSON McCULLERS is Queen of the American deep south school of writing; O'Neill was her first hero, Faulkner the object of her admiration, Tennessee Williams is a personal friend . . . She writes brilliantly about grotesques who suffer the tortures of spiritual isolation in a torrid, subtropical landscape . . . She drinks champagne, wears long flowing robes, writes at a marble table, battles with desperate ill health . . . Edith Sitwell says she has a great poet's eye, V. S. Pritchett calls her a genius, an incomparable storyteller. Her famous short novel, "The Ballad of the Sad Café," published in Argosy in 1952, is a play on Broadway.

She wrote Sucker, her first story, when she was just seventeen.

* * * * * * * * * * * * *

not so blind that she can't see how to deal with that situation and this is the proper way to deal with it."

After a little further argument the judge upheld the submission of the prosecution, and Jimmy was tried on three counts for perjury, with an alternative of one count for false pretences.

Apparently the jury believed that he was more truthful in print than he was in the witness box, and in spite of my evidence—for I supported his alibi again, but less successfully this time—he was convicted of perjury. The judge gave him a sentence of five years on each count—to run consecutively—a total of fifteen years.

In imposing this sentence, the judge said, "I hope this will be a lesson to you and anyone else who may be minded to laugh at the verdict of a jury in his favour."

I saw Jimmy before he was taken away. He was wild, I can tell you.

"You must do something about it," he said to me. "It's terrible. I shouldn't so much have objected to eighteen months for getting money from the newspaper, but fifteen years for telling the truth! I'd have done better if they'd convicted me of murder the first time. If they hadn't abolished the death penalty, it wouldn't be so bad. But, as it is, I'm worse off than if I'd pleaded guilty to murder. And I'm innocent. You know I am."

That was the odd thing about the case, sir. Jimmy *was* innocent, completely innocent of murder and perjury. How do I know? Quite simply, because I killed Gordon McNaghten.

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CARSON McCULLERS

* * *Her first short story* * *

Sucker

IT was always like I had a room to myself. Sucker slept in my bed with me but that didn't interfere with anything. The room was mine and I used it as I wanted to. Once I remember sawing a trapdoor in the floor. Last year when I was a sophomore in high school I tacked on my wall some pictures of girls from magazines and one of them was just in her underwear. My mother never bothered me because she had the younger kids to look after. And Sucker thought anything I did was always swell.

Whenever I would bring any of my friends back to my room all I had to do was just glance once at Sucker and he would get up from whatever he was busy with and maybe half smile at me, and leave without saying a word. He never brought kids back there. He's twelve, four years younger than I am, and he always knew without me even telling him that I didn't want kids that age meddling with my things.

Half the time I used to forget that Sucker isn't my brother. He's my first cousin but practically ever since I remember he's been in our family. You see his folks were killed when he was a baby. To me and my kid sisters he was like our brother.

Sucker used to always remember and believe every word I said. That's how he got his nickname. Once a couple of years ago I told him that if he'd jump off our garage with an umbrella it would act as a parachute and he wouldn't fall hard. He did it and busted his knee. That's just one instance. And the funny thing was that no matter how many times he got fooled he would still believe me. Not that he was dumb in other ways—it was just the way he acted with me. He would look at everything I did and quietly take it in.

There is one thing I have learnt, but it makes me feel guilty and is hard to figure out. If a person admires you a lot you despise him and don't care—and it is the person who doesn't notice you that you are apt to admire. This is not easy to realise. Maybelle Watts, this senior at school, acted like she

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was the Queen of Sheba and even humiliated me. Yet at this same time I would have done anything in the world to get her attentions. All I could think about day and night was Maybelle until I was nearly crazy. When Sucker was a little kid and on up until the time he was twelve I guess I treated him as bad as Maybelle did me.

Now that Sucker has changed so much it is a little hard to remember him as he used to be. I never imagined anything would suddenly happen that would make us both very different. I never knew that in order to get what has happened straight in my mind I would want to think back on him as he used to be and compare and try to get things settled. If I could have seen ahead maybe I would have acted different.

I never noticed him much or thought about him and when you consider how long we have had the same room together it is funny the few things I remember. He used to talk to himself a lot when he'd think he was alone—all about him fighting gangsters and being on ranches and that sort of kids' stuff. He'd get in the bathroom and stay as long as an hour and sometimes his voice would go up high and excited and you could hear him all over the house. Usually, though, he was very quiet. He didn't have many boys in the neighbourhood to buddy with and his face had the look of a kid who is watching a game and waiting to be asked to play. He didn't mind wearing the sweaters and coats that I outgrew, even if the sleeves did flop down too big and make his wrists look as thin and white as a little girl's. That is how I remember him—getting a little bigger every year but still being the same. That was Sucker up until a few months ago when all this trouble began.

Maybelle was somehow mixed up in what happened so I guess I ought to start with her. Until I knew her I hadn't given much time to girls. Last fall she sat next to me in General Science class and that was when I first began to notice her. Her hair is the brightest yellow I ever saw and occasionally she will wear it set into curls with some sort of gluey stuff. Her fingernails are pointed and manicured and painted a shiny red. All during class I used to watch Maybelle, nearly all the time except when I thought she was going to look my way or when the teacher called on me. I couldn't keep my eyes off her hands, for one thing. They are very little and white except for that red stuff, and when she would turn the pages of her book she always licked her thumb and held out her little finger and turned very slowly.

It is impossible to describe Maybelle. All the boys are crazy about her but she didn't even notice me. For one thing she's

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almost two years older than I am. Between periods I used to try and pass very close to her in the halls but she would hardly ever smile at me. All I could do was sit and look at her in class—and sometimes it was like the whole room could hear my heart beating and I wanted to holler or light out and run for Hell.

At night, in bed, I would imagine about Maybelle. Often this would keep me from sleeping until as late as one or two o'clock. Sometimes Sucker would wake up and ask me why I couldn't get settled and I'd tell him to hush his mouth. I suppose I was mean to him lots of times. I guess I wanted to ignore somebody like Maybelle did me. You could always tell by Sucker's face when his feelings were hurt. I don't remember all the ugly remarks I must have made because even when I was saying them my mind was on Maybelle.

That went on for nearly three months and then somehow she began to change. In the halls she would speak to me and every morning she copied my homework. At lunchtime once I danced with her in the gym. One afternoon I got up nerve and went around to her house with a carton of cigarettes. I knew she

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smoked in the girls' basement and sometimes outside of school—and I didn't want to take her candy because I think that's been run into the ground. She was very nice and it seemed to me everything was going to change.

It was that night when this trouble really started. I had come into my room late and Sucker was already asleep. I felt too happy and keyed up to get in a comfortable position and I was awake thinking about Maybelle a long time. Then I dreamed about her and it seemed I kissed her. It was a surprise to wake up and see the dark. I lay still and a little while passed before I could come to and understand where I was. The house was quiet and it was a very dark night.

Sucker's voice was a shock to me. "Pete? . . ."

I didn't answer anything or even move.

"You do like me as much as if I was your own brother, don't you, Pete?"

I couldn't get over the surprise of everything and it was like this was the real dream instead of the other.

"You have liked me all the time like I was your own brother, haven't you?"

"Sure," I said.

Then I got up for a few minutes. It was cold and I was glad to come back to bed. Sucker hung on to my back. He felt little and warm and I could feel his warm breathing on my shoulder.

"No matter what you did I always knew you liked me."

I was wide awake and my mind seemed mixed up in a strange way. There was this happiness about Maybelle and all that—but at the same time something about Sucker and his voice when he said these things made me take notice. Anyway I guess you understand people better when you are happy than when something is worrying you. It was like I had never really thought about Sucker until then. I felt I had always been mean to him. One night a few weeks before I had heard him crying in the dark. He said he had lost a boy's gun and was scared to let anybody know. He wanted me to tell him what to do. I was sleepy and tried to make him hush and when he wouldn't I kicked at him. That was just one of the things I remembered. It seemed to me he had always been a lonesome kid. I felt bad.

There is something about a dark cold night that makes you feel close to someone you're sleeping with. When you talk together it is like you are the only people awake in the town.

"You're a swell kid, Sucker," I said.

It seemed to me suddenly that I did like him more than anybody else I knew—more than any other boy, more than my sisters, more in a certain way even than Maybelle. I felt good all over

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and it was like when they play sad music in the movies. I wanted to show Sucker how much I really thought of him and make up for the way I had always treated him.

We talked for a good while that night. His voice was fast and it was like he had been saving up these things to tell me for a long time. He mentioned that he was going to try to build a canoe and that the kids down the block wouldn't let him in on their football team and I don't know what all. I talked some too and it was a good feeling to think of him taking in everything I said so seriously. I even spoke of Maybelle a little, only I made out like it was her who had been running after me all this time. He asked questions about high school and so forth. His voice was excited and he kept on talking fast like he could never get the words out in time. When I went to sleep he was still talking and I could still feel his breathing on my shoulder, warm and close.

During the next couple of weeks I saw a lot of Maybelle. She acted as though she really cared for me a little. Half the time I felt so good I hardly knew what to do with myself.

But I didn't forget about Sucker. There were a lot of old things in my bureau drawer I'd been saving—boxing gloves and Tom Swift books and second-rate fishing tackle. All this I turned over to him. We had some more talks together and it was really like I was knowing him for the first time. When there was a long cut on his cheek I knew he had been monkeying around with this new first razor set of mine, but I didn't say anything. His face seemed different now. He used to look timid and sort of like he was afraid of a whack over the head. That expression was gone. His face, with those wide-open eyes and his ears sticking out and his mouth never quite shut, had the look of a person who is surprised and expecting something swell.

Once I started to point him out to Maybelle and tell her he was my kid brother. It was an afternoon when a murder mystery was on at the movie. I had earned a dollar working for my dad and I gave Sucker a quarter to go and get candy and so forth. With the rest I took Maybelle.

We were sitting near the back and I saw Sucker come in. He began to stare at the screen the minute he stepped past the ticket man and he stumbled down the aisle without noticing where he was going. I started to punch Maybelle but couldn't quite make up my mind. Sucker looked a little silly—walking like a drunk with his eyes glued to the movie. He was wiping his reading glasses on his shirt tail and his knickers flopped down. He went on until he got to the first few rows where the kids sit. I never did punch Maybelle. But I got to thinking it was

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good to have both of them at the movie with money I earned.

I guess things went on like this for about a month or six weeks. I felt so good I couldn't settle down to study or put my mind on anything. I wanted to be friendly with everybody. There were times when I just had to talk to some person. And usually that would be Sucker. He felt as good as I did. Once he said, "Pete, I am gladder that you are like my brother than anything else in the world."

Then something happened between Maybelle and me. I never have figured out just what it was. Girls like her are hard to understand. She began to act different towards me. At first I wouldn't let myself believe this and tried to think it was just my imagination. She didn't act glad to see me any more. Often she went out riding with this fellow on the football team who owns this yellow roadster. The car was the colour of her hair and after school she would ride off with him, laughing and looking into his face. I couldn't think of anything to do about it and she was on my mind all day and night. When I did get a chance to go out with her she was snippy and didn't seem to notice me. This made me feel like something was the matter—I would worry about my shoes clopping too loud on the floor, or the fly of my pants, or the bumps on my chin. Sometimes when Maybelle was around, a devil would get into me and I'd hold my face stiff and call grown men by their last names without the Mister and say rough things. In the night I would wonder what made me do all this until I was too tired for sleep.

At first I was so worried I just forgot about Sucker. Then later he began to get on my nerves. He was always hanging around until I would get back from high school, always looking like he had something to say to me or wanted me to tell him. He made me a magazine rack in his Manual Training class and one week he saved his lunch money and bought me three packs of cigarettes. He couldn't seem to take it in that I had things on my mind and didn't want to fool with him. Every afternoon it would be the same—him in my room with this waiting expression on his face. Then I wouldn't say anything or I'd maybe answer him rough-like and he would finally go on out.

I can't divide that time up and say this happened one day and that the next. For one thing I was so mixed up the weeks just slid along into each other and I felt like Hell and didn't care. Nothing definite was said or done. Maybelle still rode around with this fellow in his yellow roadster and sometimes she would smile at me and sometimes not. Every afternoon I went from one place to another where I thought she would be. Either she would act almost nice and I would begin thinking how things

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would finally clear up and she would care for me—or else she'd behave so that if she hadn't been a girl I'd have wanted to grab her by that white little neck and choke her. The more ashamed I felt for making a fool of myself the more I ran after her.

Sucker kept getting on my nerves more and more. He would look at me as though he sort of blamed me for something, but at the same time knew that it wouldn't last long. He was growing fast and for some reason began to stutter when he talked. Sometimes he had nightmares or would throw up his breakfast. Mom got him a bottle of cod liver oil.

Then the finish came between Maybelle and me. I met her going to the drugstore and asked for a date. When she said no I remarked something sarcastic. She told me she was sick and tired of my being around and that she had never cared a rap about me. She said all that. I just stood there and didn't answer anything. I walked home very slowly.

For several afternoons I stayed in my room by myself. I didn't want to go anywhere or talk to anyone. When Sucker would come in and look at me sort of funny I'd yell at him to get out. I didn't want to think of Maybelle and I sat at my desk reading *Popular Mechanics* or whittling at a toothbrush rack I was making. It seemed to me I was putting that girl out of my mind pretty well.

But you can't help what happens to you at night. That is what made things how they are now.

You see a few nights after Maybelle said those words to me I dreamed about her again. It was like that first time and I was squeezing Sucker's arm so tight I woke him up. He reached for my hand.

"Pete, what's the matter with you?"

All of a sudden I felt so mad my throat choked—at myself and the dream and Maybelle and Sucker and every single person I knew. I remembered all the times Maybelle had humiliated me and everything bad that had ever happened. It seemed to me for a second that nobody would ever like me but a sap like Sucker.

"Why is it we aren't buddies like we were before? Why—?"

"Shut your damn trap!" I threw off the cover and got up and turned on the light. He sat in the middle of the bed, his eyes blinking and scared.

There was something in me and I couldn't help myself. I don't think anybody ever gets that mad but once. Words came without me knowing what they would be. It was only afterwards that I could remember each thing I said and see it all in a clear way.

"Why aren't we buddies? Because you're the dumbest slob

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I ever saw! Nobody cares anything about you! And just because I felt sorry for you sometimes and tried to act decent don't think I give a damn about a dumb-bunny like you!"

If I'd talked loud or hit him it wouldn't have been so bad. But my voice was slow and like I was very calm. Sucker's mouth was part way open and he looked as though he'd knocked his funny bone. His face was white and sweat came out on his forehead. He wiped it away with the back of his hand and for a minute his arm stayed raised that way as though he was holding something away from him.

"Don't you know a single thing? Haven't you ever been around at all? Why don't you get a girlfriend instead of me? What kind of a sissy do you want to grow up to be anyway?"

I didn't know what was coming next. I couldn't help myself or think.

Sucker didn't move. He had on one of my pyjama jackets and his neck stuck out skinny and small. His hair was damp on his forehead.

"Why do you always hang around me? Don't you know when you're not wanted?"

Afterwards I could remember the change in Sucker's face. Slowly that blank look went away and he closed his mouth. His eyes got narrow and his fists shut. There had never been such a look on him before. It was like every second he was getting older. There was a hard look to his eyes you don't see usually in a kid. A drop of sweat rolled down his chin and he didn't notice. He just sat there with those eyes on me and he didn't speak and his face was hard and didn't move.

"No, you don't know when you're not wanted. You're too dumb. Just like your name—a dumb Sucker."

It was like something had busted inside me. I turned off the light and sat down in the chair by the window. My legs were shaking and I was so tired I could have bawled. The room was cold and dark. I sat there for a long time and smoked a squashed cigarette I had saved. Outside the yard was black and quiet. After a while I heard Sucker lie down.

I wasn't mad any more, only tired. It seemed awful to me that I had talked like that to a kid only twelve. I couldn't take it all in. I told myself I would go over to him and try to make it up. But I just sat there in the cold until a long time had passed. I planned how I could straighten it out in the morning. Then, trying not to squeak the springs, I got back in bed.

Sucker was gone when I woke up the next day. And later when I wanted to apologise as I had planned he looked at me in this new hard way so that I couldn't say a word. . .

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All of that was two or three months ago. Since then Sucker has grown faster than any boy I ever saw. He's almost as tall as I am and his bones have got heavier and bigger. He won't wear any of my old clothes any more and has bought his first pair of long trousers—with some leather braces to hold them up. Those are just the changes that are easy to see and put into words.

Our room isn't mine at all any more. He's gotten up this gang of kids and they have a club. When they aren't digging trenches in some vacant lot and fighting they are always in my room. On the door there is some foolishness written in Mercurochrome saying "Woe to the Outsider who Enters" and signed with crossed bones and their secret initials. They have rigged up a radio and every afternoon it blares out music. Once as I was coming in I heard a boy telling something in a low voice about what he saw in the back of his big brother's automobile. I could guess what I didn't hear. *That's what her and my brother do. It's the truth—parked in the car.* For a minute Sucker looked surprised and his face was almost like it used to be. Then he got hard and tough again. "Sure, dumb-bell. We know all that." They didn't notice me. Sucker began telling them how in two years he was planning to be a trapper in Alaska.

But most of the time Sucker stays by himself. It is worse when we are alone together in the room. He sprawls across the bed in those long corduroy trousers with the braces and just stares at me with that hard, half sneering look. I fiddle around my desk and can't get settled because of those eyes of his. And the thing is I just have to study because I've got three bad cards this term already. If I flunk English I can't graduate next year. I don't want to be a bum and I just have to get my mind on it. I don't care a flip for Maybelle or any particular girl any more and it's only this thing between Sucker and me that is the trouble now.

We never speak except when we have to before the family. I don't even want to call him Sucker any more and unless I forget I call him by his real name, Richard. At night I can't study with him in the room and I have to hang around the drug-store, smoking and doing nothing, with the fellows who loaf there.

More than anything I want to be easy in my mind again. And I miss the way Sucker and I were for a while in a funny, sad way that before this I never would have believed. But everything is so different that there seems to be nothing I can do to get it right. I've sometimes thought if we could have it out in a big fight that would help. But I can't fight him because he's four years younger. And another thing—sometimes this look in his eyes makes me almost believe that if Sucker could he would kill me.

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that impossible she

BY DWIGHT TAYLOR

I HAD not yet been born at the time of my father's greatest prosperity in New York. I have no clear recollection of my father's image until he took over the Third Avenue Theatre in Seattle in 1905, with his Charles A. Taylor touring company, when I was three years old . . .

Mother claimed that the property man with this company was the most ingenious and resourceful man she had ever known. Ingenious he may have been, and resourceful as well, but why Mother continued to hold him in such high regard when so many of his devices and inventions nearly cost her her life, remains a mystery. It was his job to work out the mechanical tricks and devices with which my father always studded his melodramas.

In *Death Valley Scotty*, Mother was required to run out upon a railway trestle while the train was approaching, and to drive in a spike which the villain had removed but a short time before.

After accomplishing this good work, the train was supposed to bear down upon her before she could reach terra firma again, and in order to save herself, she was forced to hang from the trestle by her fingers until the train went by.

One night the train passed over her fingers and, fainting with pain, she dropped to the stage some twenty feet below. To be sure, the train was only of canvas, and what passed over her fingers were the feet of the ubiquitous property man who was giving it locomotion, his head and shoulders seen through the cabin window, appropriately decked out in engineer's cap and red bandanna.

Again, in Rider Haggard's *She*, Mother was almost electrocuted in full view of the audience, and was forced to retire from the part for several days.

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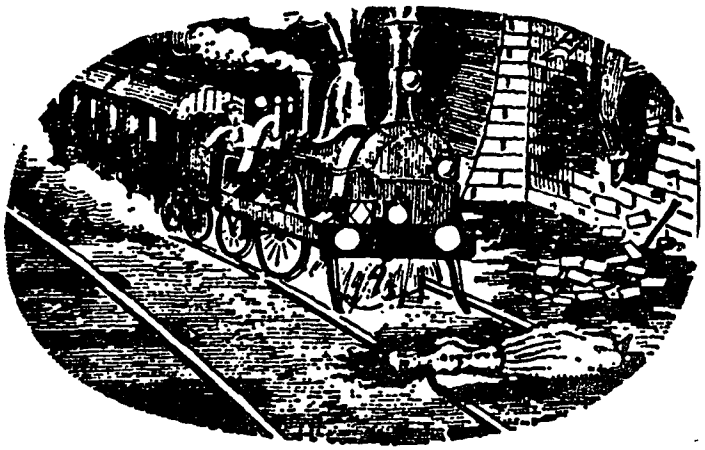

She is a mythical white woman, over two thousand years old, living in Darkest Africa, who renews her youth occasionally by submerging herself in a Pillar of Fire. *She* is tracked down by an Englishman and his young ward, who is supposed to be her descendant through an ancient love affair. They follow her to an isolated part of the jungle, where this fire ritual is to take place. But, alas, something goes wrong, and instead of emerging again as a beautiful woman, *She* dwindles before their horrified eyes into a little old monkey . . .

My mother enjoyed playing the part enormously. In one scene, *She* is defied by a jungle chieftain. She makes a contemptuous gesture in his direction and he falls dead. But Mother was not satisfied with this. She pointed out to my father that *any* woman could make a contemptuous gesture towards a man—and very often did—but the man persisted in surviving anyway. Mother felt that *She* should do something that no other woman could do, and as fire seemed to be her particular forte, fire should be a part of the gesture which put the man in his place . . .

Mother immediately went into conference with her friend the property man . . . They evolved a plan whereby *She*, when defied by the native, would snap her fingers under his nose, a shower of sparks would fly out and he would fall down dead. In order to achieve this, a couple of wires were run up her right leg beneath her costume, terminating in tiny metal plates attached to her thumb and forefinger. Another metal plate was built into the sole of her right slipper. She was thus enabled to move around freely during the scene, but at the moment when the poor

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man was to be blasted, she was to step on *another* metal plate in the stage, connected with the main current and, bringing her two fingers together, the sparks would fly.

This went off very well at the opening performance, and for several performances thereafter. But one night she stepped into some water which had been spilt in the wings. Not being a Thomas A. Edison or a Marconi, she thought nothing of this until she made her defiant gesture at the chief. She was burnt so severely that she was forced to retire for days.

But Father, realising the play was a great success, and that this mishap, with its attendant dangers and possible death to the star, had, if anything, simply enhanced its appeal, decided to continue. He approached my mother's sister with a proposition to take over the part. Aunt Bessie was only too willing, except for one thing. In the climactic scene, where *She* entered the fire, Mother wore very little beneath her gossamer costume; and for one brief, breathless moment before she changed into a little old monkey, it was obvious to even the near-sighted that she had a very good figure indeed. Aunt Bessie suggested that this scene be cut out entirely. My father—always the jealous guardian of the principles of dramaturgy—waxed indignant, and pointed out that the entire action of the play had been directed towards this one important climax.

"Important or not, I won't do it!" said Aunt Bessie . . . "I will *not* appear in a public gathering in nothing but my skin!"

But Father was a difficult man to argue with, once he got an idea in his head, and after a great deal of backing and filling, Aunt Bessie reluctantly agreed to do it.

That night, when *She* entered the Pillar of Fire, and the red lights rose around her, it was only too plain that beneath her gossamer garments Aunt Bessie was wearing a suit of long, winter underwear, which had become considerably wrinkled through the earlier actions of the play.

When my father first told me this story, he ran his long fingers down over his eyes, as if the vagaries of human nature had become too much for him to bear.

"What did Mother think?" I asked . . . "What did she say to Aunt Bessie?"

The ghost of a smile shaded the corners of my father's long, narrow mouth. "She criticised her artistically," he said. "She pointed out what the scene was all about—a beautiful woman who deteriorates into a wrinkled old monkey. 'The trouble with you, Bessie,' she said, 'is you started to get wrinkled before your time!'"

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Annie, bewitching in a red hat, was among the contraltos

VOX HUMANA

BY DONALD MACLEAY

THE REVEREND Hamish Morrison, minister of Glenalt church on the west coast of Scotland, paced his study restlessly with frequent glances at the clock.

His sermon for the morrow worried him. His teeth—or the lack of them—worried him more. That Glasgow dentist had assured him that his new dentures would be sent in time for Sunday's sermon.

He walked to the window and gazed over the loch to the brooding hills beyond, a frown of annoyance on his red and normally jovial face. For weeks now he had mumbled and mouthed his sermons, and cut them so short that the sleepiest members of his congregation were grumbling.

Then Rory Macphee had demanded to see him tonight and that meant argument. Mr. Morrison, a man of principle, had refused to baptise Rory's child until he was satisfied that Rory could make the baptismal vows honestly.

His eyes softened as his gaze ranged over the little village of Glenalt nestling snugly at the foot of the hills. They were his people, his flock, and he was their shepherd. They were deserving of far more eloquent sermons than he could give them, but he loved them and a man could do no more than his best . . .

There was a ring at the doorbell and his housekeeper Kirsty admitted Rory Macphee, a huge red-bearded bull of a man well over six feet.

"Sit you down, Rory—" Mr. Morrison indicated a chair near the fire—"And now, tell me what's on your mind."

"Before I forget, minister . . ." Rory fumbled in his pocket and laid a small parcel on the table. "This wass on the last boat that came over tonight. It wass better for me to bring it or you would not be getting it until Monday."

The Reverend Hamish Morrison breathed a sigh of relief. His teeth at last, and in time for tomorrow's sermon. He thanked Rory warmly and poured him a generous dram from the whisky decanter.

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Rory held it to the light, sniffed it, then turned to his host. "Slainte! Your ferry good health, minister." After an appreciative sip he winked knowingly. "It iss lucky I am that you are still a bachelor, or I wouldn't be enchoying as fine a drop of pure Glenalt Special as effer I tasted."

Mr. Morrison laughed. "Now, Rory, let's get down to the real reason for your visit. It's not about the baptism again?"

Rory wiped a stray drop from his beard with the back of his hand. "Och, minister, that's chust what it iss. The wife iss ferry angry with me that the bairn iss not baptised yet."

Mr. Morrison shook his head and frowned. "You've only yourself to blame. You don't enter the kirk door from one year's end to another. I cannot let you take those vows until you understand what they mean . . . Let us reason this matter out together . . ."

There was a gleam in Rory's eye when he finally rose an hour later. "It iss none of my business, minister, but I wass hearing that the congregation iss black affronted at the short sermons they are getting. Maybe that iss why I wass not coming to the kirk often."

"You're an old hypocrite, Rory, and well you know it, but what else has Glenalt to complain of besides short sermons?"

Rory paused with his hand on the door knob. "Och, minister, a lot of cackling geese in the Women's Guild iss saying that since you are so short of words in the kirk you should be marrying Annie Drummond."

"Annie Drummond?"

"Och, Annie hass a tongue that would clip cloots; she would be giving you lessons on speaking."

The Reverend Hamish Morrison frowned, then he laughed aloud. "Annie is a fine handsome lass, Rory, and about my own age. Tell them I'll think it over."

Rory looked alarmed. "You are joking, surely. Annie iss a bonny wench, a wonderful baker of scones, but she hass been inoculated with a gramophone needle. Oh, yon tongue . . . sometimes I think the de'il iss in her when she iss giving a non-stop discourse."

Rory departed, and Mr. Morrison returned to his sermon with a sigh of relief.

He started reading aloud but it sounded dull and stodgy. Then he remembered the parcel Rory had brought—his new teeth of course. How could any sermon read well without teeth?

Standing before the mirror he tried them for fit; they slipped into place top and bottom with a precision that astounded him.

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He wagged his jaw, cautiously at first, then more vigorously. They were securely anchored.

Opening and shutting his mouth like a goldfish, he admired their gleaming whiteness. Then grinning from ear to ear he tested their flexibility and was satisfied.

"Beautiful!" he exclaimed in a voice of such bell-like clarity that he started guiltily and glanced towards the door. He wasn't mistaken however, it was indeed his own voice.

Highly delighted, he tried again. "Firstly, my friends," he boomed out, then clearing his throat he adjusted his volume control to something less likely to waken his housekeeper, Kirsty. "Secondly, brethren and sisters . . ." He rambled on exhorting his unseen congregation, conscious of a growing wordy power.

There was an exhilarating looseness about his jaws. He wanted to go on and on for the sheer joy of hearing his own voice. In the past his delivery had been in a monotonous baritone. Now he was producing a range of tone varying from deep bass to a light tenor.

"*Onward Christian soldiers . . .*" he sang delightedly. His usual croak had disappeared and a resonant bass rolled out instead. Changing to second gear, he had a go at the tenor part without the slightest sign of strain so, greatly daring, he tried an increasingly higher pitch until in top gear his voice broke into a cascade of tremulous sounds not unworthy of a coloratura.

He broke off in confusion. Taking out his teeth, he was relieved to find that his monotonous tone returned promptly, and he sang in his old quavering croak.

There was nothing alarming about it really. It simply meant that for some freakish reason his new teeth stretched his vocal chords, extending his range, enabling him to speak like an orator. There was a treat in store tomorrow for the long-suffering members of his Glenalt congregation.

Finishing his sermon he went to bed deliriously happy. He woke up in a sweat some hours later at the end of a nightmare in which he had faced an expectant and packed church, his open mouth—a toothless gaping chasm—was unable to utter a word. Switching on the light, shivering with apprehension, he tried his new teeth once more. "Finally, my dear friends . . ." he declaimed in sonorous tones. It was all right. The magic still worked.

It was a lovely Sunday morning and the little church in Glenalt village was well filled. During the offertory, Mr. Morrison took stock of his congregation.

Rory Macphee had profited by last night's talk. He was sitting with his wife at the back of the church. Annie Drummond,

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dark and looking altogether bewitching in a red hat, was among the contraltos in the choir.

Starting his sermon, he thrilled to the sudden stir in the congregation as his voice boomed out. Heads were nodding and bobbing; there was subdued whispering. He paused, adjusted his range and pitch, then fixing his eye on Rory Macphee he got into his stride.

"In the world today . . ." he thundered, "and in Glenalt in particular, there is too much of this business of being on nodding terms with the Almighty . . ."

Warming to his theme he quoted Old Testament prophets, both major and minor. He caught some of Isaiah's fire and began to enjoy himself. Then the majestic grandeur of the Book of Job gripped him and he lost all sense of time.

His voice was like some mighty organ swelling to a rich crescendo on the rising tide of rhetoric, holding his strong points at double forte, then exhorting his hushed congregation in a lingering diminuendo . . . Glancing at the clock from force of habit, he got the shock of his life. One fifteen! He had been speaking nonstop for two hours.

After the service his chief elder announced in wonder, "Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple iss the longest prayer in the Bible. It can be read in about six minutes. But the Reverend Morrison's prayer this morning took twelve minutes exactly. What think you of that, chentlemen?"

"I wass chust thinking," Rory Macphee remarked solemnly, "that a greater than Solomon iss with us in Glenalt."

On Monday afternoon Mr. Morrison had an unexpected visitor. Annie Drummond was shown in, and knowing how garrulous she was he bade Kirsty bring tea.

"Oh, Mr. Morrison," Annie greeted him in a soft crooning contralto, "I'll not hinder you long. I just brought you some home-baked scones; a thank-offering for the grand sermon we all enjoyed yesterday."

As Annie poured the tea, Mr. Morrison felt a warm glow steal over him. How absolutely right she looked presiding over his table as hostess. Perhaps the Women's Guild had hit on a sound idea in suggesting Annie for a wife. It would bear thinking over . . . especially as there seemed to be a subtle difference somehow in Annie.

There must have been magic in that sermon to have wrought such a change. Her strident voice had gone, and in its place was a soft sleepy contralto. It had a soothing quality, pleasantly monotonous and vaguely familiar . . .

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His thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of the postman with a letter for him bearing a Glasgow postmark. Excusing himself to Annie, he stepped into his study to read it.

It was from his dentist, and he had to read the letter twice before the awful truth penetrated his consciousness. The ghastly words danced giddily before his eyes.

> ". . . most humbly apologise . . . owing to the criminal carelessness of our apprentice dental mechanic, the wrong set of dentures was sent to you. Those you now have belong to a Miss Annie Drummond, and she has been given yours. Fortunately you both reside in Glenalt so exchange of dentures should be a simple matter . . ."

"Merciful heavens!" he groaned as the full implication of the situation dawned on him. "Yesterday I preached my finest sermon wearing Annie's dentures, and now she's sitting in the next room eating buttered scones with mine."

He rejoined Annie at the tea table, a very worried man. How on earth could he break this embarrassing news to her, and what would be the consequences of an exchange of dentures? He would revert to his old soporific sermons. Gone would be his wonderful new-found eloquence.

And what of Annie? She now had his sleepy, soothing voice, and it suited her admirably. Was it fair to saddle her with her former strident, loquacious speech, when he could use it to much better advantage in the pulpit?

There was only one answer—Annie must never know.

Furthermore, this new Annie would be at a premium soon. He had better get in on the ground floor, so to speak, before somebody else snapped her up.

"I was wondering if we might go for a walk, Annie," he said shyly, when Kirsty had cleared the table and left them alone.

Annie blushed. "But tongues would wag, Mr. Morrison."

"I call you Annie," the Reverend Hamish reminded her gently. "Besides, I have something to say to you—er—about helping me in my work. Will—will you walk with me, my dear?"

Annie's soft grey eyes held his for a moment. "I will be proud to walk with you . . . Hamish."

When he had gone to get his coat, Annie walked over to the mirror, and smoothed a wayward dark lock of hair.

She smiled at her reflection, showing a generous mouth and a row of pearly teeth. Opening her handbag she took out a letter which she tore into little pieces and dropped into the fire.

The envelope followed and blazed up, showing for a fleeting second—a Glasgow postmark.

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by
WILLIAM HAGGARD

Like hawks, both East and West are watching Gorjan, top microwave man from the Confederate Republic, who is on to something new in missile interception. Sent to London to lecture (to escape the Iron Curtain), Gorjan has a breakdown. A hospital murder attempt is foiled by Russell, head of the Security Executive. Mitrovic, Gorjan's ambassador, finds that the instigator was Starc, his own First Secretary . . . And now, the fanatical, subversive Mellion Lee, U.S. Scientific Counsellor, is holding Gorjan for questioning at the flat of Lee's mistress, Margaret Palfrey . . .

THE ANTAGONISTS

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AT 44 Gilston Road, Mellion Lee had carried Gorjan to the bedroom. Margaret Palfrey was moving in what she would have liked to think a dream. She knew that it was not. Lee had overwhelmed her, sweeping protest aside imperiously. She hadn't in fact tried much of it. This was quite outside experience and she was frightened. She was frightened of a dozen things but Lee she feared most.

She had felt Gorjan's pulse and now she was straightening. Gorjan was breathing heavily, presently he stirred. Margaret said uneasily, "I think he's coming round."

"That's good."

"A doctor," she said, not hopefully. "I'll telephone a doctor."

"You're the doctor." Lee felt in his pocket, handing her a leather case.

"What's this?"

"Why don't you look and see?"

She opened the little box. Inside was a hypodermic and, packed carefully in recesses, three

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rows of drug capsules. She picked one out at random, reading the label. "Pentothal!"

"You've heard of it?"

"It does things to the brain. Psychiatrists sometimes use it, when they happen to be doctors too. It makes patients talk, or so they say. But it's terribly tricky stuff. I wouldn't dare use it."

"You're lucky," he said. "You're not going to have to."

"I don't understand."

Lee said indifferently, "I was going to make Gorjan talk, or rather I meant to try. I was going to ask him questions . . . vital questions. There is information about his work . . . that we must have. You were going to give the Pentothal. Now you won't have to. But there's an ordinary barbiturate in that case you've got and I think we're going to need it."

"Mellion—"

"Be quiet."

Lee was watching Gorjan. Gorjan had opened his eyes, and rolled his head away. He was sweating and grey, evidently in dreadful pain. He said thickly, "Where am I?"

"In London. In Mrs. Palfrey's flat."

"But why?"

"You've had another breakdown. Mrs. Palfrey is a doctor." Alexander Gorjan groaned. "I'd like to ask you some questions. Just a few questions."

Gorjan said faintly, "Hospital . . ."

"Not yet. Just a few questions first."

With an appalling effort Gorjan asked, "What about?"

"Your work."

"My work! Go to hell."

"I think you're a very foolish man. I can see you're in agony and I told you Mrs. Palfrey was a doctor. She has drugs in that case—release." Lee's voice was quiet and soothing. "Release. Just a question or two and an end to pain." Gorjan didn't answer. He was greyer than ever, breathing in gasps which shook him.

"And afterwards hospital. You may die if we don't take you there."

Alex Gorjan was somehow sitting up. His lower lip was bleeding where he had bitten almost through it. But he hadn't been defeated. "We'll get you," he said savagely. He fell back. Mellion Lee shook his shoulder, gently at first, then brutally.

Margaret through tears said weakly, "Mellion, he may die."

"Shut up."

"Mell—"

Mellion Lee raised his hand but dropped it. He'd lost and he wasn't used to it. He began to laugh but the sound was hollow.

On Charles Russell's instructions, Major Mortimer, Security Executive representative in the area of Mellion Lee's cottage, had gone to investigate Copeman's silence and had found him on his bed, still tied up as Mellion Lee had left him, still insensible.

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Mortimer cut Copeman loose, and with patience and cold water brought him round. Copeman, Russell's agent planted as Lee's handyman, was shocked but he didn't seem fractured; he was also very angry—he'd walked blindly into a sucker-trap and his professional pride was hurt . . . No, he hadn't seen a thing.

At the cottage, Mortimer learnt the full story from the maids, asked if he might use the telephone, and gave Colonel Russell the essential: Gorjan, Mrs. Palfrey, and Mellion Lee had left. Together.

It was this call which interrupted Russell as he was ending an interview with the Confederacy ambassador, Nikola Mitrovic. His Excellency had risen but Russell waved him down again. With a scrupulous underemphasis he said, "Gorjan has disappeared."

The ambassador took it in total silence. Russell had always liked him but he'd never admired him more. He didn't protest and he didn't blame him; he didn't waste time in questions. Instead he rose decidedly, holding his hand out. "You'll be busy," he said, "so I'll leave you to work. If you'd give me a ring at teatime—"

"I'll do that gladly."

Mitrovic, Excellency and Plenipotentiary, ex-partisan and a very hard egg, went out. Russell, standing, watched his broad back. When it had gone he sat down. This was a friend indeed.

Charles Russell began to telephone and, twenty minutes later, he was taking the replies which his inquiries had set in train. The first was from James Scobell, London head of a transatlantic Intelligence Agency of matchless resources and competence, who reported on Mellion Lee. Lee seemed to have caught a bloody nose but his manner had been normal . . . His Bentley was in its garage. But Lee hadn't been seen at the embassy or at his flat.

Two minutes later a different instrument rang. It was the area representative for S.W.10 and he'd had a piece of luck. His instructions had been to check Mrs. Palfrey's flat and dutifully he had done so. Number 44 Gilston Road was a Victorian house a little south of the fading splendours of The Boltons. Margaret Palfrey had the top flat, the owner of the middle flat was abroad; on the ground floor there was an invalid ex-Indian civilian who, around seven that morning when a Bentley had drawn up, had recognised Mrs. Palfrey and a man he'd noticed visiting her before. This man had dragged another from the car and carried him inside, a drunk presumably. The first man had driven off, returning in a taxi.

Russell gave quick instructions. Get a man on the house and a tap on the telephone . . . Then work fast on the intercept.

Russell sat back awaiting a final call which would summon him to an interview at noon with the Minister . . .

At precisely one o'clock his interview with the Minister, Mr. Gabriel Palliser, was over, and Charles Russell walked back to the Security Executive, pleased that he seemed to have won a round, but far from relaxing.

The Minister had approved Russell's plan that James Scobell

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should use his own embassy contacts to have Mellion Lee removed and with him the possibility of a diplomatic rumpus. By the time that Mellion Lee's aircraft was crossing the Atlantic, Alexander Gorjan besides being safe again would be physically at their disposal, and they could take him back with all speed to the Hemmingway Hospital. Russell hadn't yet told his Minister of Nikola Mitrovic's proposal to let Gorjan remain in England until the political storm in the Confederate Republic had passed. There wasn't any point in this until Gorjan had been recovered. If Gorjan stayed, he would be Russell's sole responsibility, in a real sense his man.

Within hours of Gorjan's arrival in England, an attempt had been made to kill him. The same could be made again. That had been normal . . . routine—almost, in its grim orthodoxy, decent. But when you went for an invalid's brain itself, putting on the pressures, even using drugs on him, hounding him as Mellion Lee was doing . . . Russell, fighting an emotion which he did not wish to allow himself, was angry—blind battle furious. He could have strangled Mellion Lee—who, he remembered, would shortly be flying away to Washington. That was something less than just. Russell had had a plan for Mellion Lee . . .

The Security Executive prided itself that it never gave orders which the recipient couldn't obey, and Russell's man watching Margaret Palfrey's flat had had instructions which were well within the practical. Anybody who looked normal, a milkman, for instance, or the man to read the meters, was to be allowed to make his call, but someone who looked suspicious was to be stopped. Not stopped at all costs—that wasn't an order which Russell often gave—but stopped if he could be. There were police within call.

The watcher hadn't had a second's doubt about the man now approaching. He looked utterly disreputable, filthy, a scarecrow.

Stevan Starc had left his taxi in the Fulham Road and was walking up Gilston Road to Margaret Palfrey's flat: his clothes were in tatters where the wire had ripped them, he was black with dirt from the railway embankment, and at every tenth pace he staggered on an ankle he now realised he had sprained.

Starc, First Secretary at the London Embassy of the Confederate Republic, was on the run. Written off by his official communist masters for the failure of his plot to murder Gorjan, Starc was now in danger of being "liquidated." His escape from the police via the railway embankment was only a temporary respite. The flat in Gilston Road, occupied by Margaret Palfrey, his Left-wing, fellow-travelling mistress, was a far safer bet than his last hideout—distasteful as she was to him. Starc had discovered she was also Mellion Lee's mistress . . . and Lee, Scientific Counsellor at the U.S. embassy, paid the rent of her flat.

At the steps of Margaret's house a man appeared from nowhere. Starc hadn't noticed him. The man said politely, "Were you calling at Flat Three?" Stevan Starc nodded.

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" Would you mind if I asked what for? "

" Why should you? "

" I've had certain instructions."

They were standing where the steps began, Starc on the first of them. He had turned when accosted, his back to the front door. The other was facing it, one step below.

Starc said to him pleasantly, " Instructions, eh? So you must be a policeman." He pulled out a pocket handkerchief, mopping his face, returning it to his pocket casually. His hand came out again in a lightning and practised draw. The watcher was looking at a gun he didn't recognise.

Stevan Starc spoke again. " I'm going backwards up those steps. The front door may be locked but I've the key to that. I must show you my back as I use it, but I can turn before you can make six steps and reach me. Or is it seven? And I've very good hearing. Right? "

The other didn't answer.

Starc began to walk backwards, his gun hand moving smoothly as his body rose, five degrees depression for each step. He was thinking again that this was England. Anywhere else the man would be armed; there would have been a bullet through his vertebræ the second he turned his back. But here . . .

He swung quickly but unafraid. No unarmed man would rush him up seven steps. He had the keys out already, both of them on a ring, and he unlocked the door left-handed. He slipped inside and shut and locked it, limping up the stairs to Margaret's flat, opening it with the other key. The fussy living-room was empty and he walked into the bedroom. Starc stopped in his tracks.

There was a man on the bed and he saw it was Alex Gorjan. He was unconscious or maybe dead. Beyond the bed was another man he recognised. They had sometimes met at parties in the days when it hadn't been distasteful to be cuckolding an American dear colleague. They seemed a very long time ago. On the nearside of the bed stood Margaret Palfrey. She had been facing away but she turned as she heard him. Her mouth dropped open in the unconscious gape he hated.

" Stevan! "

Stevan Starc ignored her, speaking to Mellion Lee. " Mr. Mellion Lee? " He still held the gun.

" How do you know my name? "

" We've met before. I'm Stevan Starc, First Secretary in the Confederate Embassy."

Incredulity chased astonishment across Lee's face. He hadn't recognised Starc and he flatly disbelieved him. This tattered and filthy gunman . . .

" I don't believe a word of it."

" Ask Mrs. Palfrey."

" Well? "

Margaret said unhappily, " He is."

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"Very well, so she knows you. But how did you get in here?"

"I still have a key."

For a moment it didn't register, then Mellion Lee flushed deeply. He stared at Margaret Palfrey and he began to move round the bed. Starc flicked the gun at him.

"Not yet—you can beat her later. That is, if I don't." With his free hand he pointed at Gorjan. "That's Alex Gorjan. Is he dead?" Lee shook his head.

"Then why is he here? What are you doing with him?"

Lee didn't answer.

Starc turned to Margaret Palfrey. "Talk," he said. "Fast."

There was a second's hesitation and an uncertain glance at Mellion Lee. Then it all came out in a craven fright. Gorjan had been asked to Lee's cottage in the country. Nothing had happened till this morning, then Lee had carried him off to London. Yes, by force. There'd been a fight and Gorjan had collapsed. Why had he been brought to London? She didn't know, she wasn't in this, she really wasn't, but there'd been some stupid idea of questioning him . . . *What sort of questions?* She didn't know, Gorjan had come round but hadn't lasted.

Margaret, if she had known it, was doing the worst thing possible. Starc was looking at her with an expression she'd never seen. A decent reticence he would have respected and courage he admired. If he'd had to beat it out of her—But no, she was spilling shamelessly. This babbling broken woman made him sick.

He asked coldly, "Then you had nothing to do with this?"

"Nothing, I swear it. Stevan—"

"What's that in your hand?"

She looked down uncertainly. She was holding the leather case still but she'd quite forgotten it.

"*What's that in your hand?*"

"Stevan, I—"

"Drop it." The case fell to the ground and opened. Starc stared silently at the spilt contents. He picked up a capsule. Pentothal. He'd heard of it.

. . . Margaret Palfrey was a duty he'd been assigned to. He had the contempt of his faith for the irritating word progressive, but it was a political fact that those who blared progress loudest were also the most naïve. Sometimes they worked knowingly and sometimes one simply deceived them. But their potential for minor treason was unlimited—no communist dared neglect it . . . he'd been assigned to Margaret Palfrey and she'd been fooling him all the time.

She had been working for his enemies, for Mellion Lee, American. Pentothal and questioning. Margaret had been a doctor once—all that fellow-travelling nonsense had been a sham. She'd utterly deceived him, humiliating him intolerably.

He raised the gun deliberately and Margaret was at the end of it. From behind the bed Lee rushed him. Starc fired and Lee fell . . .

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Starc had sat down to think. Margaret was fussing with bandages and a bowl, dropping the first and slopping the second. She was astonishingly maladroit. Starc was thinking that he'd seen all this before. The irony amused him but he hadn't time to savour it. He said to her shortly, " Relax. He isn't badly hurt. I only shot to stop him. You'll find a wound in the shoulder."

Margaret had worked Lee's coat off. He had opened his eyes but he wasn't moving. Starc was maddened by her fumbling but his private rage was spent. He must take a great decision and the risk of it appalled him. He sat for a little longer, silent, weighing what he knew was now inevitable. It was in fact his only chance—chance for his life and perhaps for his future.

If he delivered up Gorjan alive it would be triumph snatched from entire disaster.

He walked into the living-room, and rang a house in Highgate Village. When a recognised voice replied he said, " Rickoff? Starc here."

There was a second of shocked silence, then instant protest. " You must be insane. This is an open line. You were told never, in any circumstances—"

" It's desperately important."

" Why? "

Starc said, " Gorjan—" and the line began to rasp at him. There was a faulty connection or possibly they were tapping it. He shook the receiver angrily and it repaid him with a continuous howl. This time he shouted. " Gorjan—"

" I can't hear a thing."

" *Gorjan*—"

There was sudden silence again as inexplicably the line cleared. The voice at the other end said quickly, " I heard just one word. A name. *You're not to repeat it.*"

There was another long pause and Starc had to ask, " Are you still there? "

" I am. Where are you? "

" I'm at 44 Gilston Road."

" Whose house is that? "

" It's Mrs. Margaret Palfrey's flat. The top one."

" Yes, I've heard of Mrs. Palfrey."

There was a final silence as Rickoff thought. At last he said, " At midnight tonight. The car will be a grey one." He was gone.

The man watching in Gilston Road heard the shot. The noise had been muffled but he had been half expecting it. That made up his mind for him. He ran for the police car, discreetly parked, and at once was on the radio. It had been netted to the Executive and Russell himself answered.

When the outside man had finished Russell asked, " You're certain you heard a shot? "

" Quite certain. It wasn't loud enough to attract attention, but the man who broke in was armed and I was listening."

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" Did you recognise this man? "

" I can't be sure, sir. I've an impression I've seen a photograph but the background was quite different. It was a well-dressed respectable man, not a thug with a gun."

" Do you remember the name on the photograph? "

" No, sir."

" Where did you see it? "

" In one of our files, but I can't be sure which."

" Make a guess. I won't hold it against you."

" I've an idea . . . The file for the diplomats."

" Wait." There was a teletype police report on Russell's desk and he had been reading it with interest. It seemed to have been quite a morning in N.4. Stevan Starc was at large again.

Russell re-read two paragraphs of the report. " Were this man's clothes torn? "

" Yes."

" Did he seem to have been in trouble? "

" He was lame and very dirty."

" I think that will do—I'm *afraid* that will do." Charles Russell thought briefly. " Stay on the job and I'll send you a reinforcement. If this man leaves the house you're to follow him. Otherwise stay clear of it. Don't risk another shooting. Understood? "

" Understood, sir."

Russell looked at his watch and frowned. At any minute James Scobell would be leaving for Gilston Road. And now he mustn't, he mustn't indeed. That plan was dead.

Russell rang The Milton Export and Import Company, cover for Scobell's transatlantic Intelligence Agency. He caught James Scobell but only just. Scobell listened silently, then said, " But this has rather changed things."

" You're very English today."

" But seriously. You say this Starc was armed? "

" He was. It could have been Lee shooting but I doubt it."

" So do I. So who did Starc shoot? "

" Gorjan, I'm afraid. Who else? He's tried for him once already."

Scobell thought it over. " How did Starc get to Gilston Road? "

" I don't know that yet."

" And perhaps it's a side issue." There was a pause, then reluctant judgment. " My friend, we're in trouble. All of us. Mellion Lee is there too. So it's murder of eminent scientist in American diplomat's love nest. The diplomat was a witness. Why? In the morning at that." Scobell reflected again; he said at last, " I could still go to Gilston Road."

" Risking shooting it out? "

" Maybe."

" Suppose Starc gets *you*."

" Suppose."

" No." Russell was final. " That simply risks two stiffs for one." He contrived a laugh but it wasn't merry. " We've

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got to think this out again . . . perhaps in consultation with Palliser. Can you get down here quickly? I'll ask Mitrovic too."

Scobell said, " I've started."

Their meeting with the Minister, Gabriel Palliser, had been fixed at Russell's suggestion, and when the head of the Security Executive asked for an urgent meeting it was business. Palliser had agreed at once. Russell had told him that he would be consulting first with James Scobell and Mitrovic, and as the three men came in Russell introduced Scobell. He called him James Scobell, no more; his Intelligence rôle and commercial cover were tacitly accepted. The Minister had a graceful word about the importance of exports. They all sat round the table.

Forty minutes later it was satisfactorily decided. Russell had begun by putting a tape recorder on the table, playing back to Gabriel Palliser the interrupted conversation between Starc and Rickoff . . . The Minister would have heard of Rickoff? Yes, Russell had imagined it. And the other speaker was Stevan Starc who'd been causing them all embarrassment. His own ambassador especially.

Russell had run the tape twice for honest measure, then produced the single sheet of foolscap which was the passport to the Minister's good opinion of any official.

Gabriel Palliser picked it up. " May I take it this comes from all of you? "

" You may."

The Minister began to read the foolscap sheet.

Starting from the essential that Starc must be arrested we can see two courses open:

A. The orthodox course is to send police into the Palfrey flat. In the circumstances you may feel they should be armed. Since Starc is clearly desperate, that risks a gunfight in Gilston Road.

" Gilston Road," the Minister said reflectively. " We can't chance another siege of Sidney Street." He returned to the paper.

B. The second course is a variation of the original plan that Scobell should enter Mrs. Palfrey's flat. He would have removed Mr. Lee, whereafter we would have taken Gorjan to hospital. Gorjan is now assumed dead, but the problem of Mr. Lee remains. We have therefore considered the possibility of allowing Rickoff to remove Starc freely, *at any rate from the area of Gilston Road.*

Advantages of this Course

1. It obviates any shooting in the centre of London.
2. It will allow one of two scandals to be suppressed, since once Starc is out of the flat Scobell could still put the original plan into effect to the extent of removing Mellion Lee and conducting him to his embassy. Lee's own actions against Gorjan have made him political dynamite

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and we imagine you would prefer that he didn't explode in England . . .

" Then where do you think Starc and Rickoff will head for? " Palliser asked. " A dash for a ship or aircraft? "

" Or a launch on a lonely beach. The ship would be standing off."

" You feel confident of stopping them? "

" We'll be following on a level start."

The Minister considered through most of a cigarette. James Scobell was thinking too. Go to a meeting, lawyers or civil servants, and they nattered interminably, tentative and ambiguous. But go to the top like this and, if you could get there, men talked your own language. And often rather better. James Scobell thought of Washington. There were men there who could have panicked and they couldn't be justly blamed. Two foreign diplomats in different but equally destructive scandals, the traditional enemy apparently operating as freely in your capital as he did in some Satellite. Very strong nerves could stretch forgivably. But Palliser . . .

Gabriel Palliser had risen. " Course B, gentlemen," he said. " Good luck." He shook hands with all of them . . .

Russell, Mitrovic, and James Scobell walked back to the Security Executive. Mitrovic, the Confederate Republic ambassador, drank some slivovich, then slipped away quietly. He wasn't insensitive and he knew that the other two would wish to talk alone. There was nothing more he could do himself. When he had gone Russell looked at his watch.

" I've had much less time to plan in."

" So have I."

They smiled comfortable smiles, rivals in a necessary alliance. It was the happiest of relationships and perhaps the most fruitful. Russell began to talk and Scobell listened. From time to time he made a suggestion. Russell listened in turn, nodding agreement or quietly rejecting. When he rejected he gave a good reason. They were equals and quite at ease, and when they had finished both knew it without saying so.

Russell picked up a telephone, telling his secretary that he wanted six men together. As soon as they were ready they were to be netted into the intercom.

She said it would take ten minutes.

He used the interval briefly to write. Presently the intercom buzzed.

" All on the net, sir."

Russell picked up his notes, beginning to read. He read slowly, his quiet voice level. At the end he asked simply, " Are there any questions, please? "

There were two and he answered both. Then he switched off.

James Scobell said without pomposity, " We've done everything humanly possible."

" That still leaves us human."

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Rickoff had been sending some very urgent signals to his capital. It would have been possible to use the radio-telephone, but to do so would have exposed him to precisely the same rebuke he had administered to Starc, even though voice radio was heavily scrambled and supposedly secure. But one could never be quite certain, and the capital had an almost mystical mistrust of telephones of all kinds. So he had used the high-speed radio and he had sent in code. He was confident of its security.

His first message had been simple: Alexander Gorjan was now in a place from which it might be possible to attempt to remove him alive. Rickoff had asked for orders. That was all.

He did not receive them. Instead, an hour later, he was looking at a final message. The attempt was authorised. He had carte blanche.

Rickoff looked at the clock. His planning he had done in the intervals of signalling. It was fortunate that there was a warship quite so close—that was an excellent omen. The British were playing with a new submarine and the destroyer had been shadowing. Outside the limit, naturally, but the ship was a shell for a floating laboratory. She could easily put a launch ashore somewhere west of Portland. It would be three in the morning before the grey car reached the rendezvous and there wouldn't be a moon.

Rickoff had already sent a warning message to the captain and now he sent confirmation. The captain was to pick his own spot and report it by half past eleven at latest. The cars would start for Gilston Road at a quarter to twelve exactly.

Cars, Rickoff thought, not car. They'd need at least three. It would be absurdly optimistic to assume that his conversation with Starc hadn't been listened to. All the signs were that it had been. So the British would know where Starc was and Starc was a wanted man.

What else would the British know? That Starc had telephoned to a man called Rickoff. That was bad but it wasn't disastrous. He had known for some time that he was suspect already and he wouldn't object to transfer. If he could pull off this evening's work and well, deliver up Gorjan alive, he could ask for what he fancied. And he'd get it.

But it wouldn't be easy since the British would know of two things more. They'd have heard Gorjan's name and they'd have heard the appointment at midnight. Gilston Road would be crawling with police and Security Executive. Rickoff grinned. A grey car, he'd said, at midnight.

They'd need more than one car, they would indeed. They'd have to make a run for it, and a three-hour journey was inconveniently long. The grey job was faster than any known police car. Even so there was traffic, even at midnight, and traffic was unpredictable. The grey job mustn't be unprotected. So there'd be another crew behind it trained in blocking pursuit or ditching it. And the police would have more than one car out so he'd make it two himself: the escape car, *two* blocks. That made three cars.

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Rickoff corrected himself. That made four cars, since he needed one for Starc. Starc would be going too, he hadn't decided where.

Stevan Starc had passed the most exhausting day of his life. The need to keep three people under surveillance hadn't especially troubled him, for Gorjan was still insensible, Margaret Palfrey was too frightened to do anything but what he told her, and Mellion Lee had behaved with a casual calm which had astonished him. But the mounting nervous tension had left him spent.

Happily there had been things to do, small decisions to take but vital. For instance the telephone. Margaret was frightened but she wasn't to be trusted, and there was a case for ripping the wire out. Stevan Starc dismissed it. Somebody might telephone, find the number unobtainable, and report to the engineers. It would be foolish to court intrusions. That was the reason Starc gave himself but there was also another: Rickoff might ring him . . . end his uncertainty . . .

Starc put the thought behind him, finding a brief relief in the tasks which were now demanded. Margaret had bandaged Mellion Lee, but Starc could see she had done it clumsily and he did it again himself. He'd been within finger-pull of killing her but he'd shot to stop Lee, not hurt him. He'd aimed for the shoulder and got it. The bullet had gone in and out: no bone was broken.

Lee had been lucky. He'd had a broken nose already and now he had a flesh wound; he had lost some blood but his condition wasn't dangerous. Starc could tell he was in pain but not intolerably. He tied the right arm in a sling. He had put away his pistol, for he hated waving firearms like some sheriff in a Western. Even threats had been unnecessary. In a fashion Starc wouldn't have wished to define, Mellion Lee held the better hand. He knew it too. Lee wouldn't make trouble—he didn't need to. Mellion Lee was content to wait.

Stevan Starc wasn't. As the hours crawled away his nerves crawled with them. It hadn't been so bad at first but later it was unbearable. At first there had been Lee to fix and later they'd looked at Gorjan. He was still unconscious, breathing heavily and irregularly, and Starc had known that there was nothing they could do for him.

They had made Gorjan comfortable and left him, and later Lee had asked for food. Starc would have choked on it, but he had gone with them to the kitchen. Margaret had made coffee and Starc had drunk it gratefully. But Lee wanted eggs and surprisingly had eaten three left-handed. Afterwards they had all gone back to the living-room.

By late afternoon Starc was as taut as a drumskin. He told himself grimly that he had reason to be so. For nothing had been settled—nothing about himself. Rickoff knew that Gorjan was there and Rickoff would send for him. That much was certain, but nothing else. No bargain had been struck and none was possible. One didn't bargain with the Rickoffs of this world,

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since a promise made was as frail as was the breath which bore it. One did them a favour—a duty, they'd consider it—and hoped. An undreamed-of success might perhaps expunge a failure.

Or again it might not. That was something which a good communist must unquestioningly accept. Starc wasn't, this evening, feeling such a good communist.

He was suddenly conscious that Mellion Lee was smiling at him. Lee was sitting in an armchair much too small for him and Margaret was in another.

Lee said unexpectedly, " There's a drink if you want it."

" No, thank you."

" You mean you don't dare."

" You're observant," Starc said.

" I don't need to be a psychiatrist to see that you're under strain."

" Yes, I'm waiting."

" Would it help you if I talked then? "

Starc said reluctantly, " It might."

" I think it would. But we've only one subject in common."

Lee began to talk politics, Starc listening in a kind of shame. For this man wasn't ignorant. Starc had been taught to think of all Americans as fools, as men who thought only of money and sometimes when they had made enough of it of the capitalist degeneracy called the arts. They were slaves to their women, and much too lazy mentally to bother with the realities of power. But Lee didn't think like that. He made none of the intellectual genuflections to communism which in Margaret Palfrey irritated Starc intolerably. Lee was an anti-communist but he gave excellent reasons to be so: communism would destroy him, his way of life, and his private privileges; he didn't talk democracy, he talked about wealth; he had money and stood to lose it.

Starc listened respectfully. They had told him the West was blind; it mouthed meaningless words but was incapable of thinking. But this man thought clearly. Starc disagreed but he couldn't despise, for this was a decent obverse to the medal he wore himself. And Lee wasn't unfair. The price of communism was appalling, its achievement, cost-accounted, more than a little commonplace, but certainly there had been achievement . . .

Starc didn't dispute—he was learning. This man was wrong but he wasn't a pink liberal.

" I've been talking," Mellion Lee said on a note of apology.

" I've been interested and I'm grateful. I wish I'd known you before. I wish we'd really met."

" Twice, wasn't it? And at parties. Diplomatic parties are a grave for time. I didn't recognise you when you first came in."

" I know I don't look like a diplomat." Starc heard himself laugh and it astonished him. " You were much too polite to ask me questions."

" You told me how you got in here."

" Yes." There was a silence, but unembarrassed. Neither man looked at Margaret Palfrey for both had forgotten her.

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It was a moment of reflection, not of hate. Lee broke it at last.

" Did you know Gorjan was here? "

" No, that was luck. Or I hope it was luck."

" You haven't the air of hope, you know. I heard you use the telephone. Not what you said but I heard you use it."

" And you've been thinking since? "

Lee began a shrug but stopped himself; he made a grimace, half humorous, half of pain.

Starc said, " I'm sorry about your shoulder."

" You could just as well have killed me. I thought you were a communist."

" That doesn't make me a murderer—not pointlessly."

" I can see I've a lot to learn." Mellion Lee was laughing.

There was another long silence, this time relaxed, almost the silence of friends. Stevan Starc said reflectively, " So you heard me on the telephone. And what did you make of that? "

" Only the negative. You wouldn't have been telephoning to the police, nor to your own ambassador."

" You've a logical mind."

" I was once a mathematician. Not a good one but I might have been."

" But you went into diplomacy."

" I went. And a diplomat knows that there's more than one sort of communist."

" Then you've guessed what I'm waiting for? "

Mellion Lee didn't answer; he went to a cupboard, prising the door open with his foot. " I don't think a drink would hurt us."

" All right, I'll help you."

Stevan Starc mixed the whisky, and Margaret made a tiny noise. Both men looked surprised but neither apologised. Starc gave her a drink silently. When they were sitting down again he said, " I came here on the run because I'd nowhere else to go. And what I find is Alexander Gorjan and an American diplomatist. He's Scientific Counsellor at his embassy and he tells me he was once a mathematician. I also find a case of drugs. And Pentothal."

" As it happens I hadn't used it. You can believe that or not."

" If you say so I believe you. Not that it's important."

" Why not? "

Stevan Starc said deliberately, " Gorjan has been very ill. As far as I knew he was still in the Hemmingway Hospital. Yet he's here in this flat unconscious. I'm no sort of doctor but I should say his state was critical. Even without Pentothal you're taking appalling risks."

" I'd have taken him back to hospital."

" But when? "

" When he'd answered my questions."

" And if he'd died answering them? "

" I suppose I'd have swung on an English rope."

Stevan Starc's smile was a little sad. Almost with regret he said, " There's no difference between us."

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At eleven o'clock that evening Colonel Charles Russell, the head of the Security Executive, began to check his dispositions in the area of Gilston Road. He was dressed for an evening's prowling. He wore a raglan overcoat of unfashionable cut and a cloth cap full of fishing flies. This wasn't an affectation. The barbs had rusted and he couldn't get the flies out without ruining the cloth. And he was attached to that cap as he was to old friends generally. He was carrying an umbrella and was unarmed. Four paces behind him walked a younger man. He carried a walkie-talkie and something else.

Charles Russell looked around him for it wasn't an area he knew well. Once it had been fashionable and to the east it still was. Now it was fading into a sort of gentility. It would have been interesting to speculate but he hadn't the time. His interest was in number 44 and he knew about that. There was the ex-Indian civilian in the bottom flat, Margaret Palfrey's was the top, and the middle was unoccupied. Or rather it had been. Now Robert Mortimer had quietly installed himself. He had a radio too.

Russell beckoned his young man up. "Get me Mortimer, please."

The walkie-talkie buzzed, then Robert Mortimer came through. "Everything is in order, sir. I can see the road without being seen."

"Good." It was good but not essential, for Mortimer's first duty wasn't to watch for the grey car's arrival. Others would see it before him. There were men in the Fulham Road and more in The Boltons. None of them was noticeable for all of them were skilled. And all were on the radio net. Mortimer's chief task was different and Russell began to inquire of it.

"Can you see through the door of the flat?"

"I've cut a sort of spy hole."

"That's important. We want notice of how many are coming down. It will probably be only whoever goes in, plus, of course, Starc. They won't bother with Gorjan's body, but it would be awkward if Lee and Mrs. Palfrey came out too. I don't see why they should but they'd be most unwelcome witnesses. That's why you're there—to hold Lee and Palfrey. Can you hear any movements above you?"

"No, this is a well-built house. But I can see the landing and some of the stairs through the hole in the door. They'll have to come past me."

"Good again. Keep awake."

Russell passed back the walkie-talkie, resuming his rounds.

The tape had spoken of a single car but Russell expected several. This was a snatch, comparable—though more insolent—to throwing a brick through a jeweller's and decamping. And the best snatch-and-grab men always had a block car. Here there might be more for the run-out could be a long one. There wasn't a ship of Rickoff's flag anywhere in the river, and though there were some Satellite ships, it was Russell's hunch Rickoff wouldn't risk them.

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In any case, they were watched and could be stopped. Rickoff would guess that too. None of his aircraft was grounded at London airport, and the same applied there; aircraft weren't hard to stop. So it looked like a run for some lonely beach and the objective was quite unknown. Yes, the run-out might be a long one for the block cars.

Except that they wouldn't start.

Russell walked on steadily, going first to a car in Tregunter Road. It looked like a Wolseley and some of it was. But not very much. This was the police car. It had a uniformed crew of three, and Russell noticed with approval that they were rather older than a normal crew. So they'd been picked for their discretion as he'd asked.

In the back was a man in plain clothes whom Russell recognised. This man said pleasantly, " I know it's your evening but I hope you'll forgive a gatecrash."

" I'm enchanted to see you."

Russell went on. His own car was in Harley Gardens and there was a reserve in Cresswell Place. He checked the latter first, then his own, finally what looked like a taxi in the cul de sac of Milborne Grove. It looked like a taxi but there were interesting differences. The chief was the armour. The taxi wasn't armoured against gunfire, or not against gunfire primarily, but it could go into a head-on crash and the driver could walk away from it. Or it could take a car sideways and tear both the wheels off.

The driver was smoking a quiet cigar and Russell went up to him.

" Is everything all right? "

James Scobell nodded.

" You like the new London taxis? "

" Sure. I've had time for a bit of practice too. I'm glad I once drove a Sherman. It was nice of you to cut me in."

" You often cut *me* in."

" Will you have a cigar? "

Russell looked at his watch. " I don't think I'll waste a good cigar. Afterwards."

" O.K."

Russell returned to his own big car. There were two men in the front, and Russell and the young man climbed in behind. Russell looked at his watch again. It was eleven forty precisely so he still had twenty minutes. He said to his bodyguard, " Wake me when the party starts."

In two minutes he was peacefully asleep.

At a few minutes to midnight the man beside Russell woke him. " Their cars are coming down," he said, " they're in The Boltons now."

" How many are there? "

" Four."

Russell jumped out, striding briskly into Gilston Road, the young

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man still with him. Opposite 44 he halted, the width of the street between himself and the house. Four cars were driving down Gilston Road on sidelights only. They were spaced with the precision of a troop of tanks, coming from the north on Russell's side. But fifty yards short of him the driver of the leader put his hand out. The cavalcade swung smoothly across the road, stopping in front of 44. Two men got out from the second car, climbing the seven steps. The front door had been unlocked and they went in.

Russell took the radio, flicking the switch to centralise. "Acknowledge," he said.

They began to come in in turn, the monitor at headquarters, the police car in Tregunter Road, Russell's own, the reserve in Cresswell Place, James Scobell's taxi, and finally Robert Mortimer.

To the last Russell said, " Any movement upstairs? "

" None that I can hear, but they've gone past me going up. Two men."

" I saw."

Russell began to cross the street. He handed the walkie-talkie to his bodyguard, but as they went across the road the young man gave it back again. " If you wouldn't mind holding the box, sir."

" Oh, I see." Charles Russell took back the radio and the young man put his right hand in the pocket of his overcoat.

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Russell said calmly, " I hope you won't have to use it. That would spoil everything."

They walked side by side down the line of cars. There were three men in the first, a driver alone in the second, and the driver and one other man in each of the last two. They wore hats which by European standards were unfashionably large and they stared at Russell with curious hostile eyes. None of them spoke as he walked by inspecting them.

When he had finished he returned to the opposite pavement, saying to the bodyguard, " Counting the two men inside that's ten of them. They don't spare expense. Now what about the cars themselves? "

" The one opposite the steps is presumably the escape car. It's the 300 Merc—fuel injection and fast as hell. The two behind are identical but I don't recognise the make. The one in front with a three-man crew is a Ford Cortina. I don't know what it's doing here. Even if they've hotted her, she couldn't live with the Merc or us."

" Not a pilot then? "

" It couldn't be."

" A decoy perhaps? "

" Perhaps."

" We'll leave it for now but we'd better begin the party."

Russell returned to the radio, speaking to the police car. " Come into Gilston Road. Stay on the east side, the side I am on, but stop twenty yards north of me. Face south and keep the engine on . . . Harley Gardens? There are four of their cars, all pointing at Fulham Road, but we don't want a break-back. Prevent it."

Half a minute later Gilston Road had been blocked where the twin curves of The Boltons joined it. The radio said, " In position, sir."

" Good . . . Milborne Grove? " James Scobell answered and Russell went on. " There are a couple of block cars. Repeat, a couple. We don't know the make but they've left fifteen yards between them."

" That's very considerate." The fine western whine was entirely cool.

" I see what you mean. Come up to the corner but stay in Milborne Grove . . . Mortimer? "

" Voices, I think, but no movement yet . . . Wait. I heard a door open."

Russell spoke again to James Scobell. " It's time for your bit of fun. Don't miss."

A taxi came round the corner from Milborne Grove, changing gear quickly but not into top, accelerating surprisingly. It was driving along the right-hand side but just short of the block cars it swerved. It took the first on a calculated curve, tearing at its nearside wheel, leaving it crumpled uselessly. The impact had barely checked the taxi's run. The driver pulled slightly out, a yard perhaps, then banged his left hand down, taking the second

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block car almost square, crushing its radiator into an untidy concertina.

There was a shocking sound of outraged steel, a good deal of steam and swearing. The taxi began to back. All its mudguards seemed to have fallen off and they lay in the road neglected. What had been below them glinted dully in the street lamps. The taxi completed its deliberate back, then drove away steadily. The growl of its diesel faded, then was gone.

Four men had climbed from the two wrecked cars, standing on the pavement uncertainly. Other men had appeared from nowhere. They didn't interfere; they stood. There were many more than four of them. Flashlights popped alarmingly and the four foreigners threw their arms up much too late. They swore again but they didn't move. The men in the front two cars had not got out. They too were covered now.

Charles Russell crossed the road again, picking his way between the ruins of the block cars. At the foot of the steps of 44 he spoke again to Mortimer. "Anything moving?"

"No . . . Yes. They're coming downstairs." A moment of silence, then, incredulously, "They've got Gorjan."

"You mean they're bringing his body out?"

"That's what it looks like." Another small silence, this time of uncertainty. "They've each got an arm round his shoulders. It isn't the way you carry a stiff. His head's lolling down, but it's sort of moving. I—"

Russell said peremptorily, "Mortimer, make your mind up."

"His legs are trailing . . . No. He's more than half out but he isn't dead." Mortimer's voice went up a tone. "*Gorjan's alive.*"

It was the last news he'd expected but Russell accepted it instantly. He said, "Henderson, come here," and a man in a raincoat detached himself from the others. He stood silently on Russell's left, the bodyguard on his right. Russell had put the walkie-talkie on the pavement. The three men stood, at the bottom of the steps but clear of them. They waited.

The front door opened and a spotlight flamed blindingly. A man held Gorjan on either side. They blinked in the unexpected glare, hesitatingly, talking softly. Then they came down the steps collectedly. The trio at the bottom didn't move.

On the last step but one the others halted. They could see a little now. There was a semi-circle of silent faces watching them, a cloth-capped man in an ancient overcoat solidly at its centre. He was carrying an umbrella but unmistakably he commanded. The cars were quite cut off.

Very faintly Gorjan groaned. He had opened his eyes.

The cloth-capped man said formally, "This *is* a surprise. A pleasant one."

The man on Gorjan's right had his left arm round his shoulders. His right was free and now he began to move it.

"I wouldn't." On Russell's right the bodyguard had a gun out.

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The other saw it and dropped his hand. Still holding Gorjan, he stared at Charles Russell then, half in resignation, half in rage, he pushed Gorjan at him. Gorjan swung over on useless legs, all but falling finally. Russell staggered but held him.

The man on the step said in excellent English, "I'm a diplomat. I've immunity."

"The former is alas correct, the latter exaggerates wildly."

"So? But you'd be wise to forget this little farce."

"Oddly enough I mean to." Russell spoke to the man in a raincoat. "Put them both in the Mercedes, the four from the block cars too. And photograph those you haven't already taken. Then let them go. Detain the small car in front, with crew."

Stevan Starc had appeared in the doorway. The spotlight was off but somebody turned it on again. Russell said crossly, "Turn that damned thing off." They took Gorjan from him and he walked up the steps.

Seven steps, seven seconds. It was enough for another decision. "Monsieur Stevan Starc?"

Stevan Starc nodded.

"This isn't quite what I expected. I'd expected Gorjan dead. After all, you tried to kill him once."

"Those two men talked?"

"They did."

Starc said indifferently, "They always talk in time."

"Why didn't you kill Gorjan in there?"

Starc didn't answer.

"Then I don't think you can blame me if I draw my own conclusion. Which is that he was more valuable to you alive. To you personally."

"Perhaps I had hoped so."

"There's a fourth car here which puzzled me. There are or were a car for Gorjan, two block cars, and a fourth. The fourth is still here and the crew's still with it."

"Four cars," Starc said thoughtfully.

"Four cars."

"Then there might have been one for me."

Russell said levelly, "Not might have been—it is."

"But I haven't got Gorjan."

"I know."

"How long can you get in England for attempted murder?"

"I don't want you publicly tried."

"Then something less orthodox suits you?"

Charles Russell nodded.

There was a silence which Starc broke at last; he said in a calm flat voice, "Then we'd better walk down to that other car."

They went together to the Cortina. There was an empty seat in front, and Starc climbed in.

For a second Russell hesitated. This was an enemy but it was also a brave man . . . Power grows out of the end of a gun. That wasn't a dictum popular with humanists but that didn't make it

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contemptible. Russell raised his hand in what was almost a salute.

"Good-bye," he said.

As the car drove away he heard Starc laugh.

The news of Starc's death was in both Russell's papers next morning, handled discreetly in one, mercilessly splashed in the other. He read without surprise and without too much attention, for there would be a full report on his desk at the Executive.

An hour later he was reading it. Starc had been found dead on Barnes Common and clearly it was suicide. He had shot himself through the mouth, upwards into the brain, and the gun had been lying with him. There were the powder burns of a self-inflicted injury and fingerprints on the pistol. They had been Starc's and there hadn't been others.

Charles Russell put the report away. Later in the morning a senior policeman in plain clothes would call on him. He'd know what had happened in Gilston Road; he'd know because he'd been there. He wouldn't ask for instructions but he'd sound Russell delicately on the Executive's intentions . . .

Finding Gorjan alive had obviously changed the basis of an evening's entertainment. Starc had driven away without pursuit, which could only have happened if Russell had allowed it. No doubt he had had good reasons in the surprisingly altered circumstances, and the motives which moved the Executive weren't matters for the police unless they had to be. Which was not the case here.

Three men had driven away with Starc, but there wasn't a shred of evidence to connect them with Barnes Common, nothing you could put before a court. In any case Starc was a diplomat who was known to have been in trouble—private trouble; he had in fact been on the run. It looked like suicide, and an inquest would certainly find so if it wasn't encouraged not to. That suited Colonel Russell? Then it suited the police too.

And Starc's own ambassador was putting out a story which supported a simple suicide. The press was besieging Nikola Mitrovic but he was handling it skilfully. He was much too experienced to refuse to talk at all. That would have been suspicious and therefore fatal. Instead he was hinting at women and money, giving them half a story. The populars would run it hard, then, after the inquest, kill it.

And the three foreigners who had driven away with Starc—presumably the Executive would prefer to deal with that side.

The senior policeman's presumption would be correct. Russell would accept responsibility for any foreigner seen and flash-photographed in Gilston Road and he'd accept it very willingly.

It was the first of all charges on the Security Executive that it avoid international embarrassments and Russell had planned deliberately to do so. Ten photographs would discreetly find their way on to a certain official's desk and, since the rules were agreed by both sides when they were mutually of advantage, the faces on

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the photographs would quietly disappear. Of course they'd be promptly replaced: Russell couldn't stop it and he wasn't sure he wanted to. This was an open society and he'd accepted its terms of service. The price of it too. That was something which a security officer did well to remember. One who did not was soon a menace.

Charles Russell frowned. He had experience to guide him in dealing with chauffeurs to an embassy who did more things than drive motor cars, but Lee and Mrs. Palfrey raised an unaccustomed problem. They were coming to see him that afternoon—the invitation had been courteous but unmistakably an instruction—and he didn't know what to say to them.

He corrected himself for that wasn't right; he knew what to say, he had plenty of cards, but he wasn't quite sure how to play them. Starc had had orders to kill Gorjan; he had known what that meant and he'd paid the price of failure. Haled before his Maker Russell would have admitted to a certain admiration for Stevan Starc. But Lee had been less forthright and in Russell's view more criminal.

Drugs had been found at 44, though there hadn't been time to use them. But the intention had been established, there had been violence on a man in convalescence, who had been ruthlessly kept from hospital. They wouldn't know all the details till Gorjan had fully recovered and could talk. And it looked as though he

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would. The bulletin from the Hemmingway Hospital was hopeful.

They'd decided they'd have to operate, but Gorjan was a hard one, strong as the splendid oxen which worked his own country's fields. So with luck he'd recover, but not thanks to Lee.

One had a conscience and Mellion Lee outraged it. Starc stiff on a Common, Lee walking away scot-free.

Well, perhaps not quite freely. Charles Russell smiled unamiably. Perhaps not quite freely. There was also Margaret Palfrey and there were possibilities in Margaret. That was why he had sent for them both.

They were shown in at teatime though Russell didn't offer it. He put them opposite his desk. Lee was wearing a clean arm-sling and his nose was in plaster.

Russell stared at them coldly. He had a blue level eye and his stare could be disconcerting. Ordinarily he never stared, for he was a considerate man and detested anything savouring of one-upmanship. This morning he stared them both down deliberately. Margaret's eyes dropped first but Lee took a little longer.

With an untypical formality Russell said, "Both of you have caused me too much trouble."

They neither answered.

"Moreover you're still an embarrassment. You, Mr. Lee—I loathe what you've done with all my heart, but that's a subjective judgment and you're entitled to ignore it. What embarrasses me is that you chose to act in England. And, madam—yourself. I'm prepared to believe that you're an accessory at worst but the fact remains that apart from what you may have done, you've both of you seen too much."

Lee said thoughtfully, "Such as this morning's newspapers?"

"And certain events last night. So far they haven't been connected with a death on Barnes Common. I prefer it that way."

"You're frightened we'll talk?" Lee asked. He didn't himself sound frightened.

"Your father owns newspapers."

"I don't think he'd use them to break a son's career."

Russell nodded approvingly. "A good debating point." He turned to Margaret Palfrey. "And you?"

"I wouldn't hurt Mellion either."

"And how can I be sure of it? You're not man and wife."

Mellion Lee looked up sharply but Russell went on. He had always found it difficult to sustain the formal manner and now he relapsed into workaday Russell. "Look at it from my seat. I've excellent strings on both of you but they're separate strings. You follow me?" Lee shook his head.

"I'd have thought it was obvious." Charles Russell was being patient. "Mr. Lee I could gaol on a choice of charges and if anyone talked I'd have to. *And that's just what I'm afraid of.* Mrs. Palfrey is less vulnerable personally, but she'd certainly be in it deep if there were any sort of publicity. When, of course, she might talk to save her skin."

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" I'll never do that."

" I've said this before but how can I be sure of it? "

Mellion Lee said slowly, " What are you getting at? "

" You force me to state what I'd hoped you'd gather. I'd like to see you married."

"*Married?* "

" Of course. Then instead of a string on each of you I'd have one on a married couple. Who'd each have a string on the other. Simplicity is a rule of my profession."

Surprisingly Lee laughed but Margaret didn't; she began to protest but Russell stopped her. From a drawer in his desk he produced a passport. " Yours," he said blandly. " Yours again in three weeks, or much less if you know the right people." His voice changed to quotes. " ' But a special licence is granted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, in special circumstances, for marriage at any place, with or without previous residence in the district, or at any time et cetera . . . ' "

Mellion Lee was no longer laughing; pointing at Margaret's passport he said coldly, " Have you stolen mine too? "

" As it happens I haven't. But it's in very good hands."

" Whose hands? "

" I must call it a trade secret."

" But I could always get another."

" You're very welcome to try."

" So you've fixed things with my embassy as well? "

" Let's say they've been fixed."

" By whom? "

" By a friend of some influence. We've an interest in common, which is to kill this story finally."

With an astonishing lack of venom Mellion said, " But this is blackmail."

" Yes."

" You're a no-good high-up criminal."

" Yes."

" I suppose I ought to hit you."

" No."

Mellion Lee had risen suddenly but not to strike Russell. He took Margaret's arm and pulled her up. " Come on—talking's over." He pushed her through the door and turned himself. To Russell he said, " Good-bye."

" I very sincerely hope so."

Russell had risen too. He poured himself the sherry which he kept for occasions of merit. Starc had been found on a Common dead but Mellion Lee was lumbered. That was satisfying—justice. Russell drank his own health. Careless for once of syntax he said happily, " That'll learn 'em."

Mellion Lee took Margaret to an unpretentious restaurant. He ordered quickly without consulting her. She wasn't offended; she preferred him like that.

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Presently he said casually, " After we've eaten we'll apply for a licence."

" You mean you'll give in to that wicked old man? "

" I wouldn't put it like that. Maybe Russell didn't put all his cards down; maybe he's even smarter than he seems." Lee's smile was a boy's wide grin, gayer than she'd ever seen him. " Maybe we deserve each other."

" That isn't a compliment."

" None was intended."

She said angrily, " So you'd marry me to keep your job."

" I would not! I quit on my job three hours ago. Resigned."

" You didn't tell Russell that."

" Why the hell should I? He had a handful of aces whatever I told him."

She thought out the implications. " Then what are you going to do? "

" It's too late to go back to arithmetic, so I thought I might buy a newspaper. I'd run it against one of Father's, I'd perhaps make him buy me out. You might even be mildly useful. You write terrible crap for some terrible papers but at bottom you're a journalist. Look at that piece on Alex Gorjan: it was quite first class in its offbeat way. Yes, I think I'll buy a newspaper. I'll make Father sweat for once."

" That would appeal to you? "

" It's a fair second best. Real work might save both of us."

She said intensely, " Mellion—"

He laughed at her. " Real work, I said. I'm forty-five."

The chief physician of the Hemmingway Hospital was purring contentedly. It had always been his opinion that Gorjan's illness was basically spino-neural, and now the eminent specialist from Zurich had confirmed his diagnosis. He had brushed the psychiatrist aside contemptuously.

The physician went upstairs to Gorjan's room, checked him carefully and left.

Alexander Gorjan was heavily sedated but his mind had been working clearly. He knew they were going to operate and the doctors had told him there was no risk. He hadn't believed them, doctors always said that, but he had talked to Nikola Mitrovic. Nikola had hummed and hedged but finally he'd spoken. The odds, he'd been told, were on the right side of evens. Alex Gorjan had been content. He'd had a very good life and he'd lived every second of it. There had been plenty of occasions when the odds had been rather worse.

He slept for two hours, waking almost normal. The black nurse had come back and that was fine. There'd be convalescence no doubt, and that was fine too. Two or three months perhaps.

Gorjan was far from dreading them. England was the perfect place for an important man who didn't feel self-important. If he had to stay abroad a while this arrogant considerate people

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would be his choice. And there'd be wine when he was well again, to civilise this sunless land, and books. Third but not least was this delicious blackamoor.

He took a hand from the sheets and waved at her. "'Hullo."

'Oh, hullo."

'I'm back again."

"That's good."

'Should a nurse say good when a patient gets wheeled in again?"

She showed magnificent teeth. "I wouldn't know."

'I hear they're going to cut me up."

'That's nothing."

'A nurse must say that," he said.

"This one knows you're a very strong man. Oh, yes."

"I shall be in a week or two."

"I'm here on a six-month contract. Go to sleep."

Nikola Mitrovic was concluding his interview with Gabriel Palliser. "So," he was saying, "you see how it is. You know already why we sent Gorjan here, and I'm telling you we don't dare send him back yet. Equally we can't have him kicking his heels here without a reason—not after he's well again. Newspapers are too curious and most of your own too smart. So we're making a proposition. The essence, as I've just explained, is that he can work for you. He can work for you on anything but the interception of missiles by interfering with their guidance systems. I'm offering you eighty per cent of the best microwave man alive."

"And how do we pay for it?"

"Simple. You keep him alive."

"For how long do we have him?"

"I wish I knew that myself. I can't conceal that if developments go against us it might well be for some time."

Palliser said thoughtfully, "Of course the public story will be quite false. Gorjan asking for political asylum . . ."

"Of course. It's not something I'd propose to every British Minister. That is a compliment."

"I'm rather afraid it is." The Minister reflected again. "I'll have to talk to the P.M.," he said.

"Pick one of his good days, please."

His Excellency went out and, half an hour later, Palliser was talking to Charles Russell. The Minister had a nice taste in political irony and Mitrovic's proposal tickled it. Your enemies tried to kill a man, your allies to exploit him. Both of them failed. So the second-rate British were invoked to hold him safely.

Palliser hadn't taken Mitrovic entirely seriously but nor had he dismissed the possibilities. Even retaining Gorjan in England would be something with a certain oblique prestige. It would be a card which could be played against the more aggressive diplomatic systems of friend and enemy alike. Palliser loved neither.

He explained to Russell what Mitrovic had proposed to him. Russell didn't interrupt. Palliser wasn't pompous, but even a

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good Minister didn't take kindly to hearing that an official already knew. From time to time Russell looked surprised but he held his experienced tongue.

When he had finished Palliser asked, "Do you think you could keep him safe?"

"I could try very hard. I would."

"Then I'm tempted to let him stay. The working for us isn't on."

"But it's got to be on. It's all or nothing."

"Why?"

"Gorjan's not a man to stay anywhere doing nothing."

"I hadn't thought of that side." The Minister thought of it. "Suppose," he said, "suppose—"

"There's the Advisory Council on Scientific Policy, there's A.E.A., there's the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, there's . . ."

"If you were a first-class scientist, I mean first-class, would you be happy in any of those?"

"Frankly, I doubt it."

"And so do I. On the other hand there's Sir William Banner. Bill Banner is an industrialist, a tycoon I suppose you'd call him, and he's always beefing that second- and third-class scientists are nine for sixpence. He'd do anything for a top-flight man." The Minister offered a cigarette. "Suppose Gorjan went to Banner, what would Banner put him on to?"

"He's a microwave man so presumably on to microwaves. Did you know that our least successful airline was experimenting with microwave ovens which can reheat meals in a minute? Which is a twentieth of the time it now takes. But the microwave oven can't yet cope with as many meals as the traditional apparatus, and it interferes with an aircraft's electronics and radar systems. When those problems are solved catering on international flights is going to be a whole lot easier."

Palliser said admiringly, "The things you know. But I doubt if Bill Banner is heavily stuck in on microwave cooking. He's committed to plenty else, though. Plenty. Gorjan—"

Russell said sharply, "There's a condition, you know—eighty per cent of him. We mustn't cheat." He was remembering Nikola Mitrovic: "You're a deceptively tough people and as crooked as they come. The only way to hold you is a gentleman's agreement."

If the animal were extant still. . .

Russell repeated firmly, "We mustn't cheat."

The Minister looked at him with an expression he knew and loathed. Russell would have called it a politician's expression. Palliser broke it with a practised laugh. "We mustn't," he said coolly, "be caught out cheating."

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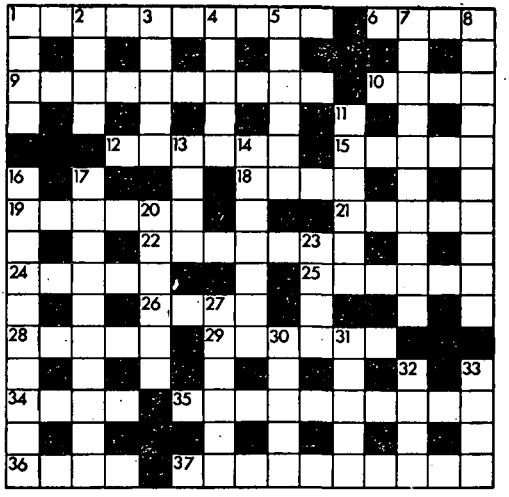
ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution on page 47



ACROSS

1 Girl gives thanks for bell in E. Pakistan (10).

6 Flooded flat! (1, 3).

9 Spatial trio (10).

10 But it's not in Asia Minor! (4).

12 Been only once to the sea? Poor fish! (6).

15 Make an attempt to deceive at the clothier's? (3-2).

18 He's sure to be a consumer (4).

19 Horse for a buck (6).

21 A dull comedist? (5).

22 One who breaks down (7).

24 He may be understood in code (5).

25 Comes from behind like a bird (6).

26 Rabble attacks (4).

28 Gone a long way—to Italy perhaps (5).

29 Is again visiting S. Africa—back to the saint's hilltown (6).

34 A round dozen either way (4).

35 Can I step it out like Polly? (10).

36 "Yond' Cassius has a —— and hungry look" (*Julius Caesar*) (4).

37 Not food for innocent babes! (6, 4).

DOWN

1 Yield, sounds like what one sows (4).

2 I am bowled by a foot (4).

3 Key-man? (5).

4 Screen and question closely (5).

5 St. Anne confused by French (6).

7 Yeats' flair for stories? (10).

8 Whose property? Debatable ground (2, 4, 4).

11 Walks stiffly with supports (6).

13 Press club (4).

14 Going south if not overcast (7).

16 Native far from new (10).

17 Medusa, novelist, provide rich fare (10).

20 Operatic carrier, perhaps? (6).

23 Cleo's servant reverts to Indian dress (4).

27 Card game—playing for small perch? (6).

30 Dramatist from Tours (5).

31 It is common so to speak (5).

32 "The ——is out of joint" (*Hamlet*) (4).

33 Tendency to be crooked? (4).

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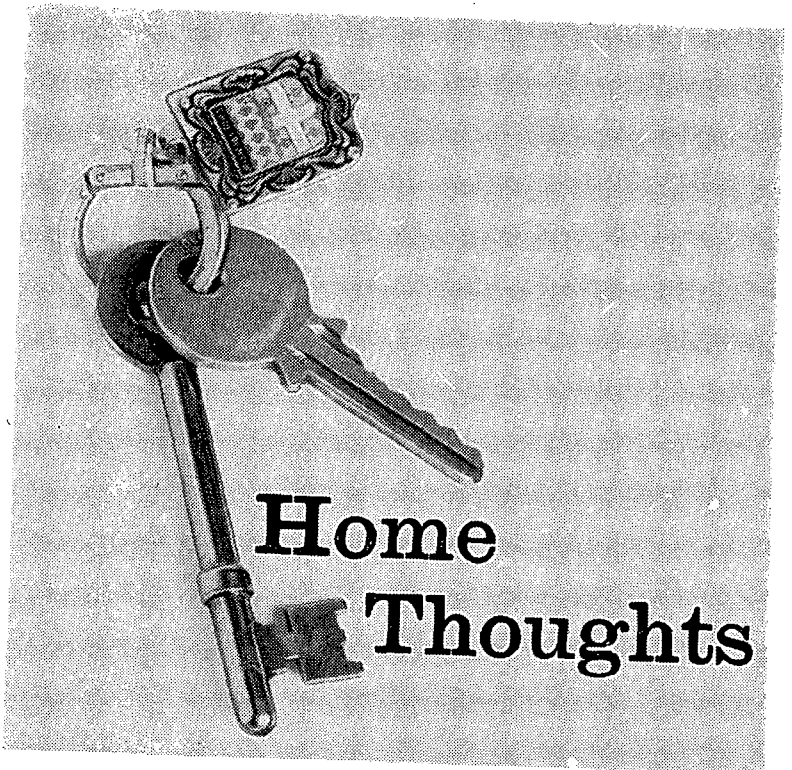

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